ROMANTIC CHESHIRE

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Scale of Miles
IRISH SEA
LANCASHI
LIVERPOOL
Hillbre I.
Bidston
BIRKENHEAD
Hoylake
Thurstaston
Bebington
Eastham
Park Gate
R. DEE
R. MERSEY
Warrington
Daresbury
Halton
Great
R. Budwo
Weaver
Frodsham
Burton
Shotwick
NORTHWICH
Delamere
Forest
Eddisbury
Vale
Royal
CHESTER
Over
River
Dee
FLINT
Eccleston
Tarporley
R. Gowy
Eaton
Hall
Beeston
Castle
Farndon
NANTWICH
Malpas
Comberm
Abbey
N
W
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S

Jim ALLEN
935 NORTH CHURCH ST.

Romantic Cheshire

Bros.

With every good wish from

Kate.

25. XII. 30.

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CHESTER CATHEDRAL

Romantic
CHESHIRE

by

J. Cuming Walters

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"THE CHARM OF LANCASHIRE"
"THE LOST LAND OF KING ARTHUR"
"IN TENNYSON LAND"
ETC

Illustrated by
Frank Greenwood

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4

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To
Sir Edwin Stockton, Kt., J.P.
of Jodrell Hall
whose warm heart and fine spirit
make him a
true type of the Cheshire
gentleman

August 18th, 1930

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MID-CHESHIRE

I. THE MAGIC MIRROR OF THE PLAIN

IF you take your stand upon that abrupt height known as Alderley Edge, not far from the Wizard's Well, you will see far-stretched below one of the fairest and most spacious of English plains. On a summer day the scene is glamorous. Over it flickers a haze of changeful tints; here and there are bunches of woodland brooding in shade; those shining cups are the meres, or prettily-named "flashes," lying amid the foliage; and that twist of glistening silver is a tiny rivulet winding towards the Dee. The rich meadow greenery, melting in radiant sunshine, sends up a vaporous exhalation; patches of garden pink and blue and gold glow out bravely; miles

afar the landscape fades away in a glimmering mist or is closed in by enfolding hills.

This is the Cheshire Plain, with its hoarded memories of many centuries, a sanctuary of charm and peace – so smiling, so silent, that it is hard to realise that in the past it was the arena of constant battle and invasion, that it shook to the rattle and clash of arms, and that in centuries of havoc and fray it helped to make and shape the history of the nation. Under the soft sward a ploughman finds fragments which yield the story of ancient races and their lore; beneath the waving flowers a gardener's spade strikes at ruins and stirs long-sleeping memories. Thought flies back to dim epochs and long-forgotten races. We turn to musty chronicles for interpretations; and here is fourteenth century Richard of Cirencester explaining that "towards the river Deva were situated, in the first place, the Carnabii," and with that fragile clue we trace back the beginnings of Cheshire's story. The antiquary's rich store comes from pre-historic time, with a growing accumulation of Celtic, British, Roman, Saxon, and Danish; then

Alderley Edge:
Looking North from Castle Rock

follows the authentic historian from Norman days, and famous and heroic names emerge, men of destiny pace forth, and deeds which are inscribed in the annals of the land glide before the vision as if a veil had been withdrawn.

This Cheshire Plain might be compared to a huge mirror, a Magic Mirror, of course, such as necromancers used, reflecting in shine and shade the happenings of long ago, and causing phantoms to re-appear, reveal their lineaments, and re-enact their dramas; for whoso can peer into that mirror with the power of the seers restores and revives the lost. There was a time when the mammoth stumbled heavily about the Plain, and when the skin-clad caveman with his rude stone weapons fought with dragons in the slime. At Lymm there is a slab of sandstone bearing the mark of a frog-like monster of the Paleozoic cycle, and thus we learn that the dread Cheirotherium haunted that region. We decipher, as on a scroll, the varied stripes and curves on the landscape, the huts, clusters, tumuli, barrows, earthworks, and broken pathways; and we understand the significance

of the flint knives, the stone hammer-heads, the bits of pottery. By the aid of our mirror we behold the semi-savages in their huts, the Goidels in their beehive dwellings, the early hunters, the primitive boatmen on the shallow rivers, the workers in the copper mines ; and we even see the proud women of the Carnabii with their torques and bracelets ; at last, amid the phantasmagoria of the first-known habitants, we watch the coming of the Roman Legions – and pre-historic man has gone like a breath from the glass !

Thus the Cheshire Plain is not only a panorama of witching beauty to-day, but it unfolds a romantic spectacle of yesterday. How much we can surmise as we gaze upon mounds and stone circles and barrows in localities, now little more than lingering names, like Cleulow Cross, Bickerton, Kelsborrow, and Eddisbury. The Stone Age passed, the Bronze Age of industry came when corn and flax were grown ; and thousands of years went by while tribes on the Plain fought against marauders from mountainous Wales ; then the mighty subduer came, formed his gar-

rison, ruled for three centuries, and departed to fight the Goth and leave the Plain to anarchy ; the conquering Norman swept down in desperation and laid Cheshire waste, for only by making it a wilderness could he ensure peace. Though Hugh Lupus relentlessly repressed, the Henrys and Edwards after his time found much to do to quell the turbulent race. And when Civil War raged, it was the Cheshire castles with the Cheshire Knights and Squires that helped to prolong and intensify the campaign, until a day came when Charles from the walls of the capital saw his army shattered and read his doom in the retreat from Rowton Moor.

So distinctive are the epochs in Cheshire history that it has been customary to make definite divisions of Roman, Saxon, Mediæval, Plantagenet, and Stuart, almost as if they constituted separate narratives. They do not, it is true, easily cohere or smoothly dovetail into each other, for violent change brought sharp reaction and the county came under domination causing alternation in character and scope. It has been a battle arena, an agricultural

region, a centre of rapid industrial developments. Periods are difficult to reconcile. There are still dreamy pastoral hamlets sleeping on their past within sight of modern towns of bustling progress; the village lapped in peace straggles towards the noisiest of railway junctions; the idyllic picture of an ancient timbered hall assorts itself with a medley pattern of mills and chimneys a short distance away.

Happily there remain unspoiled beauty spots and haunts of delight, glorious expanses of foliage, glades where the deer turn their gaze softly upon the casual passer-by, and spacious tracts where the fox lurks to the joy of the galloping squire. And the park-land of Cheshire was what Washington Irving probably had in mind – for he knew the county well – when he described in his *Sketch Book* the "vast lawns that extend like sheets of vivid green, with here and there clumps of gigantic trees, heaping up rich piles of foliage; the solemn pomp of groves and woodland glades, with the deer trooping in silent herds across them; the brook, taught to wind in natural meanderings or expand

Lymm Cross

into a glassy lake; the sequestered pool, reflecting the quivering trees, with the yellow leaf sleeping on its bosom," – all this might be written to-day of Tabley, Rostherne, Arley, Adlington, Peover, Chelford, Delamere, Gawsworth, and a score of peaceful paradises where nature retains undisputed sway, and where is recalled the lore of the past, and romance is perpetually conjured up. Blissful hours can be spent in these old-time pleasaunces fashioned with so gentle a touch and enriched by famous associations. The enticing nooks, the shadowy woodlands, the ambrosial pastures, the shelving uplands, the long avenues, the tranquil vales through which the streamlets lisp and lapse, are a fairyland where it is easy to imagine that Oberon and Titania with their elves could still find a retreat.

Though the greater part is flat, Cheshire has been likened to a choice garden without monotony; and such is the variety of the landscape, that acres of well-timbered land are found, as at Delamere, Dunham, and Capesthorne; Longdendale presents a wild hilly strip; lofty ridges are seen at

Alderley and High Legh; while Macclesfield Forest, bleak, gloomy, desolate, almost savage in parts, retains plain evidence of what it was in olden days when wild beasts were hunted, and when outlaws made it their hiding-place. Storms still sweep furiously over that darkling region, and there are guide-poles on the high road, for weird tales are told of wanderers lost in the snow, and of furtive crimes long hidden in unpopulated parts. There may the Bowstones be seen, subject of endless speculation and legend; but despite all fantastic surmises there can be little doubt that they marked the boundaries of the Royal demesne. They may also have denoted trysting-places at the converging of pathways – "By a fforest gan they mete, Wer a cross stoode in the streete," as the old rhyme runs. The road over Sponds Hill branches off where the Bowstones stand, and that seems finally to dissipate the mystery of their why and wherefor.

Not so flat a country can Cheshire be called when Soldier's Lump rises over nineteen hundred feet, and Tooleyshaw Moss, contiguous to Black Hill, but a few feet

Macclesfield Forest: The Cat and Fiddle

inferior, both of these summits exceeding Shining Tor and Shutlings Low which are popularly regarded as the chief altitudes. The county shows its steep escarpments and its grotesquely fashioned tors; adventurous climbers like to engage in exploits on Black Hill, Tegg's Nose, and Mow Cop; and is it not a proud boast that within the borders of the county, on a lower reach of the ridge crowned by Axe Edge two miles away, is the highest licensed house in England, the Cat and Fiddle, to wit? There is the rocky region of Werneth Low, overlooking the Etherow valley, where the bracing winds come keenly, and from whose height spreads a broken and disordered wonderland; and there is remote Wildboarclough, well named, where the lover of rugged scenery can get a zestful pleasure, and after his scrambles find comfort and charm along the shores of the Dane and in the nestling village of Wincle where once the Romans made a camp. Dells, cloughs, shady coverts, depths of green bowers, long leafy lanes, lush pastures and slow-winding streams, must be added to the varied panorama

of the highlands and lowlands of Cheshire.

There are some distinctive, if not unique, features also. Cheshire seems to thrust a mutilated stump into the sea, and that arm, cut off abruptly as by a sharp sword-stroke, is the Wirral, a name of doubtful origin, but perhaps " the moor of the wild myrtle." It is an eighteen-mile length of land between the Dee and Mersey estuaries, and the historian Ormerod dismissed it as being " eminently unblest." In Norman times it was woodland sacred to the huntsman, and there the barbaric Forest Laws were pitilessly enforced ; later it was a little cultivated, but was sparsely populated, and had few beauty spots or historic places. Even recent developments have not won wholehearted approbation, though the Norse, and in lesser degree the British and Danes who left their place-names as records of occupation, could little have dreamed that one day holiday resorts would spring up where their battles had raged.

This spit of land allured the Norsemen on account of its excellent harbours and the protection afforded by its insular

character. Here, records Isaac Taylor, are geographical conditions similar to those which gave rise to the two isolated Norse colonies at the mouths of the Stour and the Yare, and the result is no less remarkable. In this small space there is scarcely a single Anglo-Saxon name; but there are Norse villages like Pensby, Irby, Frankby, Kirby, Whitby, and Leasby. The Norse element reveals itself again in the names of Shotwick, Holme, Dorpool, Howside, Barnston, Thornton, Birkenhead, and Thurstaston (Thors-stone-town, perhaps commemorating Thor, the hammer-god of the Vikings); and in the centre of the district is Thingwall, a name indicating the position of the meeting-place of the Thing, the assembly in which the colony of the Northmen exercised their privileges of local self-government, that is, held a Parliament.

In the most picturesque part of the Wirral there was played out, at wearisome and even exasperating length, one of the strangest of legal comedies. The scene was Neston, the period the first sixty years of the nineteenth century, and the plot (in a double sense) concerned tyranny and

extortion. The general title of the drama is "The Neston Court of Justice," and it illustrates how legal technicalities can prevail over common rights and common sense. From Anglo-Saxon times a Wapentake, or assembly of fighting men, had existed in the Wirral, and they were ordered to appear before their lord at the Court of the Hundred at Neston. George the Third, in need of money, disposed by auction of the Court with all its ancient privileges; and a Liverpool lawyer made a good bargain by purchasing it for £230. The privileges included powers to summon, fine, and imprison persons for small offences and contempts, added to which were perquisites connected with wrecks and treasure trove. The new owner soon found methods of picking up a considerable income by petty tyrannies, quite immoral but strictly legal; he and his descendants took all possible advantage of their powers by making official appointments, compelling jury-service, and, of course, levying fines under one pretext and another. For over fifty years they made the Wirral notorious for their rapacity, and it was only

when the lordship passed to men of empty brains and pockets that the legalised rascality perished of inanition.

But nature has been far more remorseless than even man could be in this region. Coast erosion has resulted in enormous loss, and submerged Cheshire makes a story of some length. An old rhyme ran that "From Birchen Haven to Hilbre A squirrel might hop from tree to tree," but where thick Birchen Wood once stood Birkenhead Docks have been erected. Well might Drayton in his *Polyolbion* express the fear of Wirral:

That what betwixt his floods of Mersey and of Dee
In very little time devourèd he might be.

Shotwick Church stands in sombre loneliness as a monument to the lost town of that name where the river broadens out. Left behind by time, it is to be re-discovered along a narrow and seldom-frequented byway which dips down to the lonely grey flats of the Dee. Here stands the Church with its sturdy embattled tower and curious old doorway, a Church of strange interior

with its gloomy box-pews, its capacious enclosure for the churchwardens (dated 1670), its crude sandstone arches running down the centre, and its oddly-placed pulpit towards which the congregation must turn sideways if they wish to see the preacher.

The submerged forests were a puzzle to the ancient wiseacres. Webb the antiquary, writing in 1615, gravely recorded that as fir-trees of a surprising length and straightness had been found six feet under the mosses, and no man could tell how they came thither, the riddle was only to be resolved by assuming that they dated back to Noah's Flood; and a versifier registered that fine guess in rhyme:

> Ye deepe
> Low spongie mosses yet remembrance keepe
> Of Noah's Flood.

Many thousands of "theis trees," he added, "are standing black on their roots in the water which once drie land did cover." Richard James, one of the earliest of local poets (1592–1638), made note of the phenomenon of the sea experienced in the Wirral when he described—

Burton-in-Wirral

The guise
Of those chaffe sands, which doe in mountaines rize,
On shore is pleasure to behould, which Hoes
Are call'd in Worald ; windie tempest blowes
Them up in heapes : 'tis past intelligence
With me how seas do reverence
Unto the sands ; but sands and beach and pebbles
are
Cast up by rowling of the waves aware
To make against their deluge, since the larke
And sheepe within feede lower than the marke
Of each high floode.

That the coast-line once projected much further is definitely attested by the old maps and charts. The work of destruction can still be remarked ; in quite recent times portions of Hoylake have been swept away, and it is estimated that some eighteen feet of land hereabout are lost every year. The evidence is still more striking at Leasowe, where an embankment for protection has now been made. The Castle of the Cust family was a mile and a half from the sea some three centuries ago : to-day the threatening waves dash against the walls. "At Meols," writes Mr. Beccles Wilson in his *Lost England*, " the centurion

of the Cæsars could have planted himself on the coast and he would have seen the galleys of his countrymen sail down Chester Water. Now time has carried away Roman, observatory, and the coast itself, and the only prospect is water and sand." But it is the "small, hungry, and sandy isle called Ilbre," as Camden termed it, that gives us the most curious bit of history. A portion of the mainland, as a map of 1575 demonstrates, it was a "corner of Wirrall" dedicated to St. Hildeburgh by the monks who dwelt there in cave or cell. In Queen Elizabeth's time it was substantial enough to accommodate a force of four thousand foot soldiers and two hundred horse. Today it is an island; even the old smugglers' inn has disappeared; the only residents are rabbits, and the only visitors are birds.

Part of the romance of antiquity lies in those mysteries, chiefly of topography and place-names, to which there is no apparent solution. Where was the *Condate* of the Romans? – was it Congleton or Kinderton? – both places, from their position, their long history, and their relics, having equal

claims to the distinction ; and yet it may have been neither. And where was fought, in 560, that fateful battle known as Fethanleach, in which Ceawlin, King of the West Saxons, was vanquished by the Britons under Brocmal, Prince of Powys ? – a victory so important that it checked the advance of the Wessex forces for at least fifteen years. Was the scene Faddiley, near Nantwich, or must we seek elsewhere ? Wherever the spot was, the historic significance must not be overlooked, and Cheshire's part in an epoch-making event was of prime importance. For in 607 this same Brocmal was in turn overthrown at Chester by Ethelfrith, King of Northumbria, whose kingdom extended from Strathclyde to the Dee ; thus Wales was cut off from the county, and the kingdom known as Britain came to an end. A century and a half later Offa of Mercia built the Dyke stretching from the Dee to the Wye to keep out the persistent invaders, and by stringent laws forbade the Welsh to cross the boundary. " There was a certain valiant King," wrote Asser in his *Life of Alfred*, " who was feared by all the Kings and neigh-

bouring states around. His name was Offa, and it was he who had the great rampart made from sea to sea between Britain and Mercia." But the conquering race was to meet its fate from Egbert, who, capturing Chester in 828, became the master of England – a turning-point in history. Thereafter the scene became more than ever kaleidoscopic. At every turn and in every period there is change, there are re-adjustments, unexpected happenings, appearances, and vanishings. Great men come and go, great issues are fought out, great results emerge. The Cheshire Plain, spread before us, now seems to be a scroll on which we can trace amid crooked lines and patches the disordered hieroglyphics of a thousand years.

Yet with all its permutations the county had lingering customs and retained quaint usages. The Church, the guilds, the official courts, and the schools, contrived to maintain much ancient precedent and tradition, and even outworn follies and excesses were continued long after they had lost significance. The perambulating three days' Miracle Plays at Whitsuntide, to which the

monks, the craft guilds, and the populace heartily gave themselves up, were a great event and an influence until the Reformation came. And much curious history, public and private, is deposited in the sturdy granges and halls still showing traces of their moats, and still displaying the rich charms of their teeming orchards and gay gardens ; and in the characteristic black-and-white timbered houses standing on the soft sloping meadows or amid the shades of hoary woods. Thomas Fuller, who did justice to so many in his *Book of Worthies*, has not omitted to pay high tribute to the gallantry of " Chesshyre gentlemen," remarkable for " their number, antiquity, loyalty, and hospitality, four admirable qualities," and the last, he quaintly surmised, had some connection with the quantity of wheat-sheaves found in their coats of arms, twenty-six of which he had himself counted. " Stout, bold, and hardy, of stature tall and mighty, impatient of wrong, ready to resist the enemy or stranger," are further lines in the portraiture that has been drawn of the yeomen. Crises bring forth courage in war, hardihood in

sport, fervour in loyalty, zeal in religion, and in the throb of continual action the finest human qualities are produced. So we are led to think of the four dauntless Squires who faced the French at Poictiers, of gallant Brereton who disdained all thought of defeat, of the Leghs who proved their devotion to the throne with their blood; we think of at least two patriotic historians who spent their best years in writing the nation's chronicles; and we think of poets who drew their inspiration from nature as they wandered about the winding lanes and mused in the quiet vales of this county of beauty and romance.

CHESTER CATHEDRAL FROM NORTH WALL

II. WITHIN THE CITY WALLS

DIRECTLY we set foot in Chester we are in the Middle Ages. Time has slipped backward. Our environment is unfamiliar. Are we dreaming, or are these streets and houses substantial things? Surely those strange arcades cannot be for everyday use, and those decorated timber houses for ordinary habitation. Bewildered we gaze around and behold the composing of a city of fairy-tale, with its Castle looming on the height, its Cathedral glowing rosily in sandstone, its church-pinnacles grey and slender, and then, the big dolls'-house structures with bulging windows, the quaint inns and yards, the Rows which convert the pathways into shadowed corridors, the old bridges spanning the slow river – all, all in

the fashion and fantasy of other days when men's brains conceived curiously and their hands wrought wonders.

In the midst of these antiques we could expect almost anything to happen: a cowled monk, perchance, to appear from yonder corner, a dashing cavalier to emerge from the portal, winsome faces to peer from the latticed casements, or a troop of soldiers with nodding plumes to march from the square. And forthwith we begin to conjure up names, to recall events, to refashion scenes. Here Hadrian ruled in the name of Rome, here Hugh Lupus, the Norman Wolf, sate in princely might and made his stern decrees, here the Plantagenet, Tudor, and Stuart Kings came in state, here Royalist and Roundhead clashed in battle; and here the crowds gathered for the Miracle Plays, roared at the old-time sports, and saw the horses race for prizes of silver bells; hereabouts it may have been that the jolly miller of the Dee trolled his song and cared for nobody, no, not he, in the days of bluff King Hal!

Chester, the capital. Its very founda-

tion is so remote that it sinks into legend, a surmise of "once upon a time." It was built, says a fourteenth-century chronicler, by Leon Gawr, a mighty strong giant; a statement disputed forthwith by another early chronicler who declares the builder to have been King Leir, a Briton fine and valiant. Did not, a critical writer has enquired, the monkish sage who carried back the Cestrian annals to Noah's Flood, put his tongue in his cheek and chuckle softly at the quaint conceit that in the youth of the world the site of Chester was occupied by the city of Neomagus, so-called from Magus, the son of Somothes, the son of Japhet?

The early glimmerings of history reveal it as a centre of strife between Welsh and Briton; then about 60 A.D., it materialises into the Roman *Deva*, headquarters of the Twentieth Legion which bore the proud title of Victoria Victrix.[1] The *Castra* is conspicuous in massive walls, towers,

[1] "In the extreme angle of this county, near the Deva, was the Roman colony Deva, the work of the Twentieth Legion, which was called Victrix, and was formerly the defence of the region. This place is supposed to be what is now termed West Chester." – *Richard of Cirencester.*

hypocausts, and vaults; and altars have been found dedicated to "Nymphis et Fontibus" (nymphs and fountains), and to "Genio Loci" (the genius of the place). A name that springs up during this era is Marius, son of Arvirigus; and Cæsar's Tower in the centre of the Castle is a reminder of the imperial sway. It is still possible to make the circuit of the city, nearly two miles in circumference, upon the broad highway formed by the massive walls with their parapets. After the constructive Roman went, the destructive Briton came, leaving little for history to note except the new name of Caerleon which he gave to the place. The next centuries were a welter of strife among contending tribes, and in 605 Ethelfrith of Northumbria swooped upon Chester and laid it waste. Intent upon vanquishing the hostile region under Brocmal, he made his ruthless onslaught on the priests of Bangor who were standing apart but praying for the victory of their British kinsmen. "If they cry to their God against us, though they do not bear arms, yet they fight against us," so the historian

Bede reports him saying, and Geoffrey of Monmouth completes the story – "He commanded his men to turn their arms first against them, and so two hundred were honoured with the crown of martyrdom and admitted that same day into the Kingdom of Heaven." That same day, also, Chester passed into Ethelfrith's hands.

The chequered tale of strife and peace continues, and at one stage in the history the name of a heroine of no transitory lustre flashes out. The Lady of the Mercians, King Alfred's daughter, Ethelfleda, a great warrior-woman, with no little statecraft also, won back Cheshire from the marauding Danes. She made the fortress at Eddisbury, now but a name ; she raised castles and forts ; she kept invaders at bay ; and she ruled. But no sooner was she dead than all her work was undone, and once more Chester fell into the enemy's hands, until Edmund the Elder slew the Welsh chieftains and threw back the Northumbrian hosts. Athelstan, his successor, completed his work, and his name lives in Saxon Song (the highest

fame) which tells of the victory of Bromborough and the departure of the Northmen "in their mailed barks o'er the deep water."

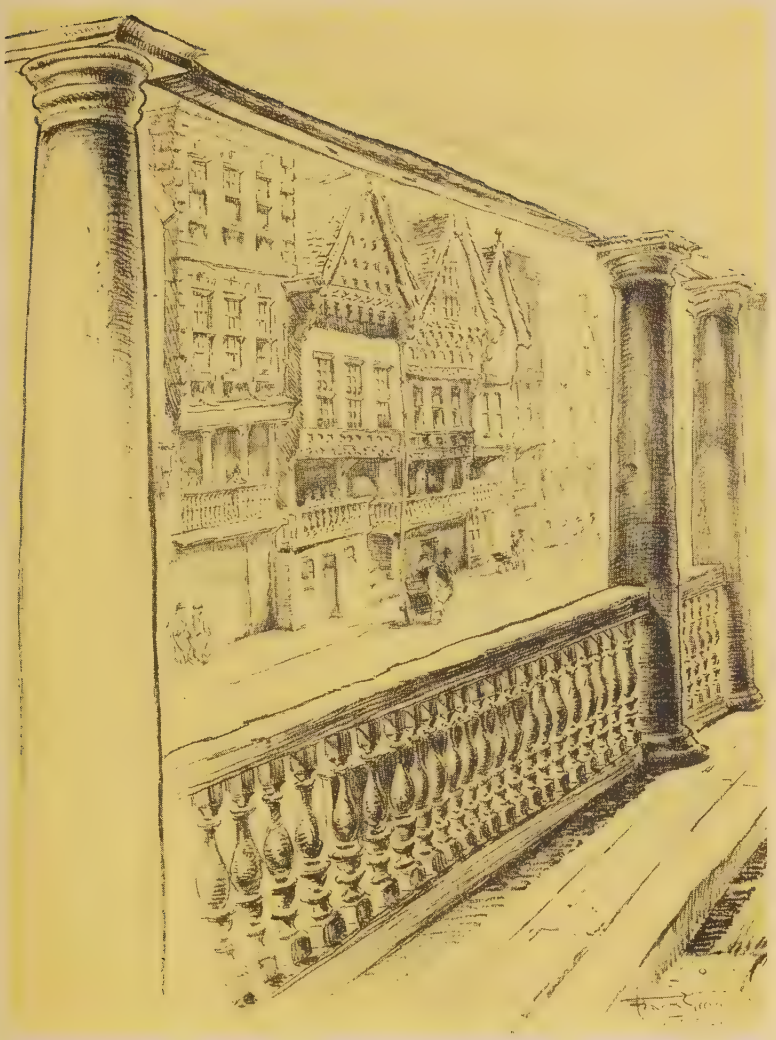
Edgar the Peaceful stands forth next. He led "all his chief forces to Chester, and there came to meet him six kings, and they all plighted their troth to him," and he "exhibited them on the river Dee in triumphal ceremony. For, putting them all on board the same vessel, he compelled them to row him as he sat at the prow, and boasted that henceforth he and his successors were veritable Kings of England." His house, his field, his cave still bear his name and keep alive his memory. Yet did the ravaging Danes return, and their leader Canute was crowned, to become the hero of many legends testifying both to his power and his wisdom. Thereafter Saxon and Norman fought out the issue, Chester being the last to submit to the Conqueror. But he gave the city a ruthless ruler in Hugh Lupus whose two-handed Sword of Dignity is still to be seen in the British Museum. The King, so says one of the ancient rhymesters,

Gave to him for his inheritance
The County of Chester with its appurtenance,
By victory to win the aforesaid Earldom,
Freely to govern it as by conquest right,
Made a sure charter to him and his successor,
By the Sword of Dignity to hold it with might.

Among his rights, he could call a Parliament, devise statutes, and order his subjects as if a prepotent prince. While the Bishop held the church lands, the Earl held the rest of the county for the King, and divided it among his barons each of whom had a castle stronghold. Halton, Beeston, Malpas, Nantwich, Stockport, Aldford, Shotwick, and Frodsham made a ring of fortresses for defence and attack, and Chester became a centre of power, and the county a palatinate. Its stormy history continued for centuries while it was ravaged by the Welsh under Llewelyn, besieged by the Roundheads in the Civil War, and saw the last stages of the Jacobite campaign.

The tranquil aspect to-day must not deceive us; the beguiling old houses have known other than deeds of romance. Even the royal visits were seldom missions of

peace, nor the fluttering flags tokens of festivity. The picture revealed has its illusion, and the underlying truth is not so fair as heart desires, for war, plague, and scarcity have too often provided chapters in Cheshire's story. But it is one of the most picturesque of cities, where we can set our feet on fragments of Watling Street, can enter crypts which have never yielded up the secret of their origin and purpose, linger in the arched stone corridors, the Rows, and, leaning over the balconies, muse why these balustraded passages were ever constructed. For there is nothing like them elsewhere. These Rows run parallel with the streets, the front portions of their second storeys forming a paved promenade reached by steps from the paths below. The galleries are open in front ; beneath are the shops and warehouses. Was this a device to secure the wares of the merchandise against possible Welsh marauders? George Borrow thought so, and declared unequivocally that – "Should the mountaineers break into the town, as they frequently did, they might rifle some of the common shops,



Chester: The Rows

where their booty would be slight; but those which contained the more costly articles would be beyond their reach; for at the first alarm the doors of the passages, up which the stairs led, would be closed, and all access to the upper streets cut off, from the open arches of which missiles of all kinds, kept ready for such occasions, could be discharged upon the intruders."

It is rather surprising to find that Borrow, who so readily appraised good things, spoke slightingly of Chester when he first saw it – "It is," he said, "an ancient town with walls and gates, a prison called a castle built on the site of an ancient keep, an unpretending-looking red sandstone Cathedral, two or three handsome churches, several good streets, and certain curious places called Rows." That is altogether too summary. It does not allow for the succession of surprises awaiting the visitor, who can find a Roman hypocaust in a shop, see a wine merchant's casks stored in a crypt of early Plantagenet times, discover an ancient chapelry with a vaulted roof of stone, make his way to

the Water Tower which is a reminder of the time when Chester was a port and ships came up the river to be moored at that spot, and linger on the Bridge of Sighs, a survival of that gloomy age when the condemned passed to their doom with the priest's last words sounding dully in their ears. Here are the stately Tudor mansions leaning across the streets – Bishop Lloyd's Palace with its elaborate carvings, the Palace of the Stanleys, once Kings of the Isle of Man, and the picturesque home of the Earls of Shrewsbury (now the Bear and Billet hostelry) with its timbers, buttresses, and sparkling lattices. And in Watergate Street is an edifice which deeply arouses emotion, God's Providence House, regarded as the only place in Chester which in 1652 escaped the ravages of the Plague, and now invested with romance by the art of Mrs. Linnæus Banks. Famous names recur. Dean Swift visited the old Yacht Inn, and there are associations with Matthew Henry and William Penn.

It is probable that the Druids had a temple at Chester, and that it is upon the

site chosen by them a Roman edifice arose. The oldest of all the ecclesiastical buildings is St. John's Church with its Anchorite's Cell, the reputed hiding-place of Harold the Saxon, and with its weird wooden coffin enclosed in the ruined wall. The Saxons dedicated their Church to Werburgh, the favourite Saint in Cheshire, daughter of a Mercian king. She succeeded her mother as Abbess of Ely, lavished her care on monasteries, including that of the Benedictines in Chester, and in the Abbey

> She is shryned richely,
> Pryoress and lady of that holy place.

Upon her pious foundation the Church arose, and in course of centuries the Cathedral shaped. When Ruskin described a typical English Cathedral, its towers, deep-pointed arches, walls of rugged sculpture and confused arcades, he bade us think of the drowsy felicities in the secluded scene, and to " weigh the influence of those dark towers on all who have passed through the lonely square at their feet for centuries, and on all who have seen them rising far away over the wooded plain, or catching on

their square masses the last rays of the sunset, when the city at their feet was indicated only by the mist at the bend of the river." He had not Chester specifically in mind, and the details of his picture do not altogether fit; yet in many respects the impression serves, and the old Cathedral in the old city with the river bending away and the western sunrays slanting upon its red walls typifies all that is most solemn and beautiful in an English landscape. With nearly a thousand years of history, with its architectural reminders of Norman and Tudor, with its shrines and tombs, its sculptures and carvings, it seems to be the achievement of those "architects of dream" who

> Felt their own thought worthy of record
> In monumental pomp,

and where

> Dedicated shapes of saints and kings,
> Stern faces bleared with immemorial watch,
> Look down benignly grave, and seem to say,
> "Ye come and go incessant, we remain
> Safe in the hallow'd quiets of the past."

Its history in main outline is the history of

most fanes, the rise and expansion of the Abbey due to faith and devotion, and its attainment of power and wealth ; then the conversion of Abbey to Cathedral when the monasteries were dissolved, and the creation of a new diocese. But there are incidental stories of exclusive interest, such as that early one of the strife between monks and parishioners regarding the altars in the south transept, the demolition of the Parish Church of St. Oswald, the recovery of the site, and the building of a new church separate from the Cathedral where independent service was held until recent times. The High Altar of Wood from the Holy Land, the glorious fourteenth-century choir-stalls, the arms of Wolsey, and the Flags, including that which was wrapped round the body of General Wolfe, are features and memorials about which we linger within that " sanctuary of vast repose " where

> Before the dreamy eye
> Wave the mingled shapes and figures like a faded tapestry.

Modern Chester does not drowse upon its past, but is awake and astir ; and the broad roads that converge upon it are thronged

with invaders and besiegers, though they come in friendly guise and have no more perilous contest in mind than the coveted Cup. But we put the hands of the clock back and how the old city appeals to the imagination – its origin a surmise and its early history a legend. It was the theatre of ever-varying drama when Romans governed and kept court, when Hugh Lupus had his Parliament, when English kings fought back the Welsh, when King Charles was welcomed, when King James departed amid frowns, " the people seeming not well disposed," and when handsome, reckless, feather-brained Monmouth rode his own horse at the races and won a prize. There were shows, and pageants, and plays, and sports ; there were epics of battle in which heroic figures loom out and melt like shadows. There were plagues and calamities in the city, and houses were built, destroyed, and rebuilt more beautifully to delight the eye. All through the centuries it was alive and aglow, and to-day we behold it a mixture of ancient splendour and modern charm, its customs trailing from mysterious tradition – " a fairy-tale of the heart."

THE NUN'S GRAVE, VALE ROYAL

III. THE ROYAL WOODLANDS

THE Conqueror, with a whole country for spoil, was lavish in his rewards to his followers and companions-in-arms, and he fulfilled a double purpose in distributing lands, as prizes, among the Norman lords, and expecting them to act as governors and administrators and render him future service out of their new strength and wealth. Between the Deva and the Mersey lay an area rich and beautiful, Delamere, and it became the treasured possession of Hugh Lupus who had fought at Hastings. It was a favoured hunting ground, but in the time of the first Edward its history took a new course. There were two events in the early career of the heir of

Henry III which almost suggest that in his day miracles had not yet ceased. On his returning from the Holy Land he was in imminent danger of shipwreck, and he vowed that if his life were preserved he would build a monastery for a hundred monks ; whereupon the storm ceased, and though the vessel sank the Prince reached land. The second and greater wonder was that when the peril was past, he not only remembered his vow but fulfilled it to the letter.

As Earl of Chester, the Prince had visited the county and received the homage of barons and knights at Shotwick. The spacious vale had pleased his eye, and Vale Royal was the name it bore. Now he chose it as the site for the Abbey, planned on such a scale that it took fifty years to complete, and the cost was the huge sum, by the standard of that time, of thirty thousand pounds. Five years after he ascended the throne as Edward I the King laid the foundation stone of the Cistercian Monastery and slowly it rose amid the scene of woodland beauty.

But the Cistercians were not a peaceable

Order, nor did they take particular means to win favour with the people. The villeins clashed with them on the question of tithes, but the Abbots had armed force and charta law on their side and exacted their right to the full. There were revenges; a monk caught outside the sacred enclosure was in danger of his life, and one of them, it is recorded, being caught was forthwith decapitated and his head used as a football. A serious rising took place in the fifteenth century, when the Abbot was slain. Again the Church prevailed, and the offenders with ropes round their necks duly made submission. As is not unusual with the despairing, they sought hope in prophecy. A notorious seer, Nixon of Over,[1] of whom strange stories are told, declared in befitting enigmatical fashion that a thorn which grew before the Abbey should one day form its

[1] If there were ever a real Nixon, a more or less incoherent prophet, his birthplace may have been the old market town of Over, though its Parish knows him not. So much of a myth is he that he is placed alternatively in the age of Edward IV and James I, and this may account for the fact that the dubious prognostications attributed to him are believed to have been composed long after the events themselves had occurred. His references to Vale Royal were particularly enigmatical and require a second Daniel to interpret their meaning. "When an Eagle shall sit on the top of Vale Royal House," so one of them ran, "then shall an heir be born who shall live to see great battles in England." Another, prophesying peace, bade

doorway ; and what was thus foretold was triumphantly fulfilled with the material aid of King Henry the Eighth after a waiting period of three centuries. The history of the Abbey had not been edifying, and at one period a special law had to be enacted against the monks for offering sanctuary to outlaws and participating in their depredations.

Fourteen Abbots ruled Vale Royal Abbey from John Champneys, the first, to John Harwood, the last ; the most noted being the thirteenth, John Buckley, who, in those days of the church militant, commanded in person three hundred of the Vale Royal tenantry who fought at Flodden. The expulsion of the monks took place in Reformation times at the instance of Thomas Holcroft, and in place of the original Abbey, of which only the basement remained, a large and stately residence

the true believer to watch the fall of Vale Royal Wall near the pond, and "if it fall downwards, then shall the Church be sunk for ever," but "if it fall upwards, then shall the Church and honest men live still." No falling upwards has yet been reported. On the other hand there lingers a legend that the oak in the forest under which Nixon was wont to prophesy had been converted into a table and that the vein in the wood repeated the prophet's likeness over its whole surface. In this age of scepticism, however, this fable and the predictions likewise are losing their hold upon popular faith.

was erected above the placid waters of the Weaver.

A king had given to this expanse of England's green and pleasant land the name of Vale Royal; it was a king who founded the Abbey which for so many centuries was to be the centre of religious power and to show its serrated outline amid the glades; it was king after king who came hither a-hunting with abbot and earl and knight. For the King's diversion, Delamere had been converted into a royal forest, extending from Eddisbury Hundred to Nantwich. Hamlets were destroyed, and the expanse reserved for sport. An ascent from Oakmere still permits a view of what was once "a town of nobles" in Saxon days, the Eddisbury of Ethelfleda, a fortification now represented by a mere clump; yet hereabout, in the Pale or Chamber of the Forest of Mara, dwelt that long-dominating personage, the Master Forester, the first of whom, appointed by King Edward, was Ralph de Kingsley, of Frodsham. His duties were to preserve the game, attend the noble huntsmen, and produce timber for building purposes at

the Castle, Abbey, and corn-mills of Chester.

The position grew into supreme importance under Richard Done of Utkinton, who took over the entire jurisdiction of the Forest, lorded it like an autocrat, and laid the foundations for a long heritage with all its rights and privileges. The Dones were ousted from their Chamber in the Forest by Richard de Grosvenor, the Great Hunter, but regained it by purchase after two hundred years. Finally it reached the Crewes and Ardens, and the present Chief Forester, the Earl of Haddington, possesses at Arderne Hall the famous horn which was the Forester's badge.

Some of the records of the office read amazingly in these times. Once every six weeks the Master Forester made a tour of inspection, in the course of which he could claim without demur " one day's sup, to tarry all night, and to break his fast on the morrow for himself, man, and beast " ; while twice a year the tenant-serfs were under orders to provide him " two strikes of good oats " for his horse, a strike containing four bushels. Except during the hunting season the Master

Forester was privileged to cut fern for his use; he took a halfpenny (equivalent to fourpence or more) for every beast grazed between Martinmas and Michaelmas (November and September): he appropriated all birds, hawks, merlins, bobbies, and jays, all beeswarms, and the right shoulder of every deer slain or taken; while the horns of any dead deer found in the thickets were to be sent "with all fair speed" to the Castle, ten miles distant. All moneys for pigs feeding in the wood also went to the Master Forester.

If a tenant trespassed or otherwise offended, the Forester could seize his estate and take choice of beast and fowl—any superfluity went to the Earl. Lest, after all these graspings, penalties, and forfeitures, it should so happen by miracle that a tenant accumulated any money, were the value under a hundred shillings the Master Forester put it in his purse; if over, the Earl took it; so we may assume that in those good times there was no encouragement to thrift. Finally, the Master Forester, having taken for himself everything handy and profitable, secured

the privilege of free pasturage for his cattle and received all storm and windfall timber as fuel. By seizing everything and paying nothing he thus made the office of Master Forester well worth retaining in the family on and off for five centuries, and no jest was it to the miserable villeins to say it was Done.

Such privileged persons could not be expected to escape one of King James's knighthoods, and consequently we find the Master Forester enjoying that distinguished honour in 1617 after his Majesty had been exhilarated by a day's hunting. At that time Delamere Forest had " no small store of deer both red and fallow, plenty of pasture in the vales, wood upon the hills, fern and heath in the plains, great store of fish and fowl in the meres, and pewits in the flesher," truly a goodly heritage. When the time came for change and relief, the Forester being too rich and the deer too plentiful and destructive, a scheme was brought before Parliament to abolish the ancient office ; but the Dones could not be allowed to pass out without precious compensation in the form of grants of

land. Large portions of the chase have been enclosed during the past century, but the royal woodlands, with oak, ash, chestnut, fir, larch, beech, and birch, interspersed with a very riot of bracken and briers, still constitute a pleasure-ground and create a picture of sweetness and tranquillity. To the north juts out the abrupt crag with its ancient earthworks overlooking Helsby; to the south runs a gracious declivity towards the hunting-land of Tarporley. Bright little homesteads peep out here and there, and sinuous paths thread the remnants of the Forest and lead to mysterious stone relics, and to the deep shadowy recesses where stand the patriarchal trees. Deer roam the glades and look out shyly at a casual wayfarer through this merry greenwood of Old England. What the far-famed Forest of Mara and Mondrum was in its prime the relics attest, though there has been sufficient denudation to make the term "forest" an ironical commentary upon what once was, and now no more is. Cosy towns snuggle within what was once the Old Pale – Hartford, Broxton, Woodhouses,

and Forth, among the number, with their treasuries of ancient lore. What tales some of them could divulge of the Forest Laws which once prevailed, when the peasant's life was easily forfeited so that the nobleman's sport could be unhindered, and when even the dogs not reserved for the hunt were crippled by the iron gauge to prevent all possible trespass.

But the Forest has deeper interests than these for student and explorer. The antiquary and archæologist find their way to the ancient camps and tumuli, to Kelsborrow where once the British had a station, and to Castle Hill Cot where some unknown race buried the burnt ashes of its dead; while the nature-lover finds ceaseless delight amid the bronzes and greens and reds of the autumn foliage, and amid the multitude of Scotch firs, with golden bracken at his feet and the crimson foxgloves gently swaying in the breeze, feels that he is in the hushed region of enchantment.

AT RUDHEATH

IV. GLEAMS THROUGH THE BATTLE-SMOKE

FEW would imagine that the peaceful Cheshire Plain, with its fertile fields and flowery spaces, is literally a deep-scarred battlefield where for long centuries fateful issues both to the county and the nation were decided. It comes into history as an arena for the wars of races. After the Hallelujah Victory of Bishop Germanicus and his Britons, the Picts and Scots were driven back, and Cheshire remained British for four centuries. But there were other foes to come, the Jutes and Saxons, and even King Arthur

with his order of chivalry and religious ardours could not convert the pagans or hold the invaders back. After the Saxon, came Norman, Tudor, and Stuart with sword and fire. We trace the oscillating fortunes of feudal lords, see castles besieged, taken and re-taken, watch the redoubtable bowmen under Stanley turning the tide of battle at Flodden, and we learn of personal valour almost unexcelled and of men yielding to an unwonted extent their happiness, land, fortune, and life for the cause to which they were devoted. Though war is an ugly and squalid reality, out of its grey ashes and bedrabbled soil we can pluck a few fair blossoms of romance. They shine like crimson and gold in the murky atmosphere. Stories of vengeance are interspersed with stories of sacrifice, bitter reprisals with noble chivalry. In the dark background with armies in conflict glow heroic figures, and lustrous names blaze out amid the battle-smoke. Exploits of epic quality are to be recounted, and irrespective of ethics and purpose, right and wrong, we can laud the valorous spirit displayed on all sides.

The intensity with which Cheshire men fought, setting aside self-interest and forgetting family ties in the one consuming desire to achieve victory for their cause, had been tragically demonstrated during the Wars of the Roses at Blore Heath, when kinsmen slew kinsmen; and so grievous and tragic was the event that Drayton celebrated it in lines of lamentation in his *Polyolbion*:

There Dutton Dutton kills: a Done doth kill a Done:
A Booth a Booth: and Legh by Legh is overthrown:
A Venables against a Venables doth stand:
A Troutbeck fighteth with a Troutbeck hand to hand:
There Molineaux doth make a Molineaux to die:
Our Egerton the strength of Egerton doth try:
O, Cheshire! wert thou mad of thine own native gore,
So much, until this day, thou never shedd'st before!
Above two thousand men upon the earth were thrown,
Of whom the greater part were naturally thine own.

Some of the most remarkable qualities

of the warriors, commanding admiration and pity alike, were to be displayed again during the years of internecine strife between King and Parliament. Throughout that period Cheshire had no interval of peace, and the broken land, the devastated towns, the battered strongholds, attested the fury of the onslaughts and the fortune of the frays. There were captures and re-captures, and lordly castles fell, were recovered, were lost again; no one could foretell from month to month, sometimes from day to day, how the balance would sway. Leaders came and went, were flushed with victory and abased with defeat. The noise of battle rolled from all quarters – its reverberations heard from Chester, Nantwich, Beeston, Warrington, Sandbach, Middlewich, and Crewe. The hostile forces of Cavalier and Roundhead were almost equally matched. Families were sharply divided; and knights and yeomen who had in former time united in one purpose against a common foe now strove against each other fiercely. Neighbouring towns were in conflict. The loyal section regarded the King's enemies as

Beeston Castle: The Keep

traitors; the Parliamentarians regarded the King's supporters as oppressors. Both sides had their high-spirited leaders, and Mainwaring and Legh fearlessly matched themselves against Brereton and Monk. So far as heroism and ardour went the combatants shared equal honour and renown.

The county was utterly rent. Everywhere could be seen flaming towns, crashing fortresses, and the long trail of smoke. Take, as a typical episode, the varying fortune and final fate of Beeston Castle, now so commanding and picturesque a ruin on the hills, showing its fragments of once mighty bastions and massive walls and its broken though still dominating towers. Beeston was one of the great Randolf's designs, and it played its part in war through stirring centuries. Mounted high on its sandstone rock, and built to resist and endure, it looked defiantly over the Plain and seemed impregnable. A hundred men-at-arms could be quartered there, and woe to those who strove to mount the rough stone steps and enter the gateway of the fortress. From its aery towers what views

were commanded from Delamere Forest to the Peckforten Hills and far beyond in clear weather. Here, like another Saladin in a Saracen stronghold, the fiery Norman could and did dare the King himself to battle.

It was not until the Civil War brought its ravages that Beeston tottered – it fell to Parliamentarians and Royalists in turn, and was seized by the swaggering Sandford, a mixture of poltroon and hero, braggart and fire-eater, the Bobadil of the Cavaliers, breathing war and slaughter, wasting his hours in inditing threats, hoping to win battles by wordy bullying. To do him justice he could fight at a crisis, and while we deride his vain-glorious epistles we give him credit for the capture of Beeston Castle with only eight men and helping to turn the tide of fortune for the King. This episode brought to ruin and shameful death the hapless Puritan commander, Steel. Yet still the fortune of Beeston Castle wavered. It was besieged anew, relieved by Prince Rupert who looted and devastated all the surrounding district, and finally was surrendered by the starved but sturdy

garrison of sixty men, who had but a peacock, a peahen, a turkey-pie, and a couple of biscuits left to sustain them, after Rowton Moor had been lost. The last act was their marching out with the honours of war ; a few months later the Castle was dismantled, and a history of four hundred and twenty years came to an end. Look across the Cheshire Plain to-day and on the line of bluish hills above Tarporley you will see the dusky broken outline of that once-proud citadel, its gaunt remnants cutting the horizon and making a fantastic pattern among the clouds.

There were minor but none the less poignant tragedies. One of the fairest scenes in Cheshire to-day, a little village which is like a redolent garden-patch, surrounded by white cottages and topped by a brown square-towered church, was blackened by a culminating horror which has left a haunting shadow through the ages. The place is Barthomley, and the time was Christmas Eve. The Royalists had achieved some successes – Beeston Castle had surrendered, the Elizabethan Dorfold Hall had been captured, half a dozen resisting little towns

had been overcome, and troops entered Barthomley. The villagers crowded into the Church; the Royalists set fire to the benches and pews. There was no holding out, and the little band, headed by the vicar, asked for quarter. They were promised their lives, but as they came forth a dozen or more of the men were ruthlessly slaughtered, the Royalist leader vaunting in a despatch that he "found it to be the best way to proceed with this kind of people, for mercy to them is cruelty." The massacre at Barthomley subsequently formed one of the indictments against King Charles at his trial. To-day, at the scene of that terrible deed, now so lovely an abode of peace, we might recall those tender words that Dickens wrote on nature's healing of the wounds of the battlefield; and of this very place he might have said – "The larks sing high above it, the swallows skim and dip and flit to and fro, the shadows of the flying clouds pursue each other swiftly over grass and corn and field, over roof in the nestling town among the trees, away into the bright distance on the borders of the sky and earth where the red sunsets fade."

BARTHOMLEY

During the long and fierce campaign the figure of Sir William Brereton, the Roundhead soldier and champion, is seen incessantly amid the battle-smoke. He is victorious, he is defeated; but he is never quelled. He takes strongholds and leaves them, returns to the attack, is always vigorous and alert; there are marches and counter-marches, there are desperate moments and hopeful rallies. Brereton is the type of dauntless and resourceful hero, and not until all is over does he stay his hand for the cause which had his heart. He was a great leader, and his Cheshire followers felt the force of his inspiration. At Nantwich where the tide of battle flowed so uncertainly before the critical and decisive moment was reached, he gave proof after proof of unquenchable zeal and unfaltering determination. The redoubtable Rupert had cause to remember the indomitable Brereton. It was at Nantwich, closely besieged but holding out against "iron bullets red hot as fire," with the aid of women as well as men, that Brereton took his last great stand and made the advance of the Cavaliers impossible. Then, advancing on

Chester, he achieved the victory of which Deadman's Field is a grim memorial. It comes upon us as a strange fact that in Cheshire the fate of General Monk might have been decided; and had he suffered, as did so many more, for the part he took on the Royalist side, the course of history might have been changed when, on Cromwell's death, it was left almost to this one man at a crisis to decide whether the Stuarts should be recalled and the throne restored. But Monk, though taken prisoner at Nantwich, had his life preserved; and he lived to place an army at the disposal of the second Charles.

Although the final battle in the contest between Cavaliers and Roundheads did not take place in Cheshire, it was from the Phœnix Tower on Chester Walls that the King witnessed the rout of his forces, and the overthrow of his hopes, at Rowton Moor. On that fatal day, September 27, 1645, Sir Marmaduke Langdale was defeated by General Poyntz. Three years had gone by since the city had heard the first alarm of war raised, and the Mayor had slashed the Roundheads' drum to pieces

as a sign of his own loyalty. But Chester, though long faithful to the King, was unable to withstand the growing peril. The governor, Sir Abraham Shipman, was threatened by Brereton at Hawarden, and in desperation he ordered all the houses outside the Roman Wall to be razed, and the inhabitants to take refuge within. Lord Byron was the military commander, and amid the acclamations of the citizens the King arrived in person and was lodged at the house of Sir Francis Gammal in the Lower Bridge street. The Parliamentary attack was awaited with some confidence, and Langdale gave battle and kept Poyntz in check in a first encounter, but the Royalists were not foreseeing or perspicacious enough to cope with the strategy of the enemy. They allowed the beleaguering forces to send reinforcements to Poyntz who was able with the fresh troops to attack Langdale both in front and rear and drive him off. The blundering continued to the last. Gallant Sir Geoffrey Shakerley, of Lower Peover, who was attached to Prince Rupert's cavalry, had been sent by Langdale to the King for orders. He sped

so well that (as the family chronicle relates) "he galloped directly to the river Dee, under Huntingdon House, got a wooden tub (used for slaughtering swine) and a batting staff (used for batting coarse linen) for an oar, put a servant into the tub with him, and in this desperate manner swam over the river, his horse swimming by him (for the banks there were very steep and the river very deep), ordered his servant to stay there with the tub for his return, and was with the King in little more than a quarter of an hour after he left Sir Marmaduke. This expeditious method saved him going nine or ten miles about by Holt Bridge." Such a resourceful adventure deserved to succeed, but Charles vacillated according to character, and the assistance of which Langdale was so urgently in need did not arrive until six hours after the battle had been lost. In the following February, Chester, worn out by alarms and privations, surrendered. The citizens were reduced to sad straits. The lands were mortgaged, the funds quite exhausted, the plate melted down, and the city outside the Walls was in ruins.

But in various ways and for many years Cheshire contrived to have links and associations with the Stuart cause. John Bradshaw, of Marple Hall, a former Mayor of Congleton, was President of the Tribunal at Whitehall which tried and sentenced King Charles, and Major-General Harrison, of Nantwich, was one of the so-called regicides, on whom revenge was subsequently taken. An extraordinary tale is told of his fortitude during the hours of his mutilation and execution at the Restoration. As he was going to suffer, someone in derision called out: "Where is your Good Old Cause?" And with a cheerful smile, it is recorded, he replied: "Here it is, and I am going to seal it with my blood." And having forgiven the hangman, given out his money, and embraced his servant, "he went up the ladder with an undaunted countenance." The spirit in which this Cheshire gentleman died had such an effect on the public that it was decided not to have any more executions near the Royal Court. Bradshaw by that time had died, so vengeance upon him was inflicted in another form. Evelyn opens his Diary

under date of January 30, 1661, with the words: "This day, O the stupendous and inscrutable judgments of God! were the carcasses of those arch rebels, Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton, sonn-in-law to the Usurper, dragg'd out of their superb tombs in Westminster, among the Kings, to Tyburne, and hang'd . . . thousands of people who had seene them in all their pride being spectators." But, patriots or bigots, right cause or wrong cause, what does it matter now? We think only of these bygone Cestrians as men of valour, men of such faith that life, as one of them avowed, was too small a price to pay for it.

The name of another Cheshire man, Sir George Booth of Dunham, springs into sudden prominence during the Cromwellian era. Lucy Hutchinson, in her famous Memoir of her husband, the Puritan Colonel, relates how the Presbyterians opposed Cromwell's Parliament, and Booth "uttered some threats"; immediately afterwards he and his faction "went into their several counties, and laid a design all over England, so dexterously, secretly, and unanimously carried on, that before

the Parliament had the least intimation of it, the flame was everywhere kindled, and small parties attempting insurrections in all places ; but their main strength was with Sir George Booth in Cheshire, who there appeared the chief leader of the rebellion." The rising was suppressed, General Lambert " through the cowardice of the enemy obtaining a very cheap victory " near Winnington Hall, a seat of the Stanleys. Despite this rebuff, which was followed by an ignominious flight, Sir George was created Lord Delamere at the Restoration by a monarch who was grateful to a Roundhead who had deserted his leader.

At last, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the long story of war and vicissitude in the county comes to an end, with the dribbling away of Prince Charlie's ill-fated army on its return from Derby and on to doom at Culloden. The recollection of his adventure is not gratifying, and is devoid of romance from beginning to end. When the Highlanders marched through Longdendale (Mottram-Glossop) it is recorded that – " they roughed it during

their stay, killed cattle, and for lack of utensils boiled meat in hides skewered up at the corners; and the inhabitants were greatly alarmed for the safety of their valuables, their money, and their cattle." The march back was lamentable and ignominious, but the Cheshire men were merely onlookers, and when the last stragglers had disappeared the long-hovering shadow of war melted away, and there was peace.

THE CHESTER ROAD
AT DELAMERE

V. "THE SEED-PLOT OF GENTILITIE"

THAT curious and exceptional phrase, "the seed-plot of gentilitie," applied by John Speed to Cheshire, is explained by the fact that it is a county of families of long descent who have in the highest and most honourable sense demonstrated their claim to the dignity of gentleness in the old-fashioned meaning of that term. They proved their worth and established their station by deeds. In the brave days of old when men's first thoughts were of battle, the Cheshire men sprang into note by exploits of singular daring; and in the days of peace and progress they were found prominent in the realm of law and governance. There was a monk in *Piers Plowman* who confessed that he

did not know the Paternoster "as the priest it singeth," but he kenn'd, he said, of matters more weighty, the rhymes of Robin Hood and Randle, Earl of Chester.

A mighty and memorable hero this Randle, or Randolf, or Ranulph, must have been, a de Blunderville of Oswestry by origin, but coming into Chester history as Earl Palatine when he was eleven years of age. That was in 1181, and six years later he married the Lady Constance who figures in *King John* as the lamenting widow of Geoffrey Plantagenet and the apprehensive mother of little Prince Arthur.

An adventurous life had Randolf. The Welsh drove him into his castle at Rhuddlen; he sent a message to the trusty de Lacy, Constable of Chester, and Hugh Dutton, his steward, gathered a rabble of licensed strolling minstrels at the Midsummer fair and with their aid put the besiegers to flight. Randle was a king's man, supporting Henry III at his coronation, and refusing to desert the treacherous John at Runnymede. He was a crusader

and a legislator by turn ; he fought against the French ; and it was not until he was falsely accused of sympathy with Llewelyn, when King Henry made his expedition against Wales, that his sorely-tried loyalty could no longer bear the strain. He might have proved a great danger, this man of small stature and choleric temper, had not death come suddenly upon him. He had deeply impressed the multitude, and homage was paid to this "last relic of the great feudal aristocracy of the Conquest" when his solemn obsequies took place at Chester. His monument was the Castle he designed in Saracen fashion at Beeston ; his fame survived in ballads. Chester remembered that he granted fairs, and gave the citizens abstention, as if he possessed kingly power, from paying Peter's Pence. A bold man who knew his will and exercised it ; the sort of master whom the masses fear and revere.

The Black Prince found remarkable helpers and comrades among the Cheshire gentles. His banner at Creçy was rescued from the French by Sir Thomas Danyers, of Grappenhall. In the Prince's train were

Sir Hugh Venables of Kinderton, Sir Hugh Calveley who was reputed to be " so gallant a soldier that nothing was held impregnable to his courage and conduct," and Sir Robert Knolles who could " drive the enemy before him like flocks of sheep, and batter down their citadels into such spiry and forked ruins that they went by the name of Knolles' Mitres."

But the consummate deed of heroism was that of a knight and his four squires at the battle of Poictiers. It is an amazing story.

In September 1356 sixty thousand Frenchmen under the leadership of the monarch himself were arrayed against eight thousand English under the Black Prince. It was to be a battle not only for victory but for revenge, as the maraudings of the English troops had exasperated the enemy. So far as numbers went the contest was unequal enough, but Sir James Audley set an example of dauntlessness when (according to Froissart's *Chronicle*) he craved the post of danger, and " the Prince sayde, ' Sir James, God gyve you this day that grace to be the best Knight of all.' " With

Doddington Castle

his four trusted friends, Delves of Doddington, Fowleshurst of Crewe, Hawkstone of Wrinehill, and Dutton of Dutton, he took his station at the end of the narrow road leading up the hill from which the foe would advance; and behind the hedges and in the vineyards he placed the Cheshire archers with their long yew bows. And when the heavily mounted French rushed down they were met with a whistling hail of arrows, which pierced their mail, pinned them to their horses, and brought them to the ground. There was a scene of wild confusion as those in front were trampled down by their own host rushing onward. The only means to reach the enemy was down the narrow lane, and there, like another Horatius with his liegemen, Sir John barred the way, and, despite his heavy wounds, yielded not an inch of ground. Poictiers battle savours of the miraculous, the odds so great and the victory so complete.

Audley, never wavering throughout the fierce contest, "was soone hurte," but "as longe as his breth served hym he foughte, then they layde hym under a hedgesyde

to sew up his woundes." And when he was carried in a litter to his leader, the Prince "kyst hym, and made hym grete chere," declared him the best knight, and then and there settled upon him five hundred marks a year for life. But this was the age of chivalry, and the legends of the Round Table had not been chanted by the *trouvères* in vain. We might be reading a page from Layamon or Caxton when we find in Froissart the memorable passage —"'My lords and gentlemen,' sayd Sir James, 'you see these four squyres, and what glory I have gained has been through their valyantnesse. I give to them the gift of my lord the Prince. I disinherit myself of it.' Then the lords and knights looked at each other and sayd—'May the Lord remember you for it.'" The Prince, hearing of this renunciation, wondered whether his reward had been high enough to satisfy the hero. He was soon assured on that point—"'These four squyres have served me long and loyally in many dangerous besynesses,' sayd Sir James. 'At this last battayle they served me such wyse that had they done nothynge els I

was bound to reward them . . . wherefor, Sir, I had not ben curtesse if I wolde not to have rewarded them. Pardon me, Sir; both I and my squyres shall serve you as well as ever we dyd.' "

None of them were losers in the end. There were prisoners, including the French king, his son, and seventeen earls; there were spoils and ransoms; and the four Cheshire heroes acquired large estates.

But above all they had an unique memorial of their valour. Some way south of Nantwich, down quiet lanes and across fields where mighty oaks, "self-poised upon their prodigy of shade," show their huge boles and stretch their gnarled branches, where the beeches rise straight and strong to giddy height, and the cedar spreads its layers of shade in a green solitude, may be seen a square tower, part in ruin. It presents a rare spectacle with its patterned stone balustrades and its stained walls upon which four warrior stalwarts in mail have been sculptured, while two others are to be seen in alcoves. This tower is all that is left of Doddington

Castle, but it suffices to show what was the original conception and with what effect it was executed. The battered figures are of the comrades in arms who won Poictiers, and wonderfully impressive is this monument that keeps alive their fame.

It is disappointing to close the brilliant story of the Audley family with a reference to the dubious part taken by the lord of that name in the Perkin Warbeck rebellion. Francis Bacon in his *History of Henry VII*, recounting the strange story of the impostor and his faction, remarks that " Lord Audley, a nobleman of an ancient family, but unquiet and popular, and aspiring to ruin, came into them " ; and after the decisive Battle of Deptford Bridge the tragic sequel is thus described : " The Lord Audley, the blacksmith, and Flammock, as commonly the captains of commotions are but half-couraged men, suffered themselves to be taken alive . . . the Lord Audley was led from Newgate to Tower Hill, in a paper coat painted with his own arms ; the arms reversed, the coat torn, and he at Tower Hill beheaded."

Doddington Castle:
Knights of Poictiers

Brave spirits are often unquiet and capricious. Examples are afforded by that race of geniuses, the Stanleys, large in history, who bestrode two counties, Cheshire and Lancashire, and imposed their dominance upon the people. They were warriors, administrators, rulers; they were always active; now king's men and now rebels, they made and unmade peace, helped to turn the tide of fortune in critical days, and risked their heads for the cause they espoused. We find them victorious and defeated, now sharing the triumph of a Henry and now passing into the gloom of tragedy with a Charles. Sir William Stanley's mysterious defection, which cost him his head, led Henry VII to travel into Cheshire; and Bacon, who gives an account of the visit of the King to Lathom "to make merry with his mother and the earl," explains it as an open demonstration to the world that the proceedings against Sir William had not "in any degree diminished the affection he bore to Thomas his brother," a diplomatic rather than a complimentary act.

True and faithful servants of their monarchs were the Egertons, two of whom were

standard bearers to King Henry VIII, Sir Urien Legh of Adlington who sailed with the Earl of Essex to fight at Cadiz against the Spaniard, tough Sir George Beeston who lived to be over a hundred and took part in the fight of the Armada (as did Francis Vernon of Haslington), and Sir Cloudesley Shovel, the naval commander. But it must not be suggested that "gentilitie" pertains alone to warriors. Among those who served the State were Sir Ranulph Crewe, to whom Pepys devoted some entertaining pages in his Diary, and William Shippon whom Pope immortalised in a couplet. Crewe has been termed an equivocator, and his patriotism may not stand the severest of tests; none the less he had genius, and at a crisis he displayed courage. As Speaker of the House he voiced the protest of the Commons against the infringement of their privileges by a king who held to the doctrine of his divine right; he suffered humiliation, though the years brought ample compensation.

Quite different is the other Parliamentarian whose name curiously insinuates itself into Cheshire history. How many

people to-day understand Pope's allusion to "honest Shippon"?

> I love to pour out all myself, as plain
> As honest Shippon, or downright Montaigne.

So far as deeds go the man himself might have been forgotten but for this preservation in the amber of a poet's verse. And what a conjunction, Shippon and Montaigne! Was it justified? When we remember that Lord Rosebery linked his name with Chesterfield, Carteret, and Pulteney, we feel there must have been something deserved, and yet his claim to remembrance has become obscure. William Shippon was a Stockport man, born in 1675, and educated at the Grammar School before proceeding to Cambridge. His circumstances were made easy, though not happy, by his marriage to a woman of wealth; and he entered Parliament, first as Tory representative of Bramber in Sussex, then, when he was turned forty, of Newton in Lancashire. Like so many of his native county and of Lancashire too, he was a partisan of the Stuarts, but he eschewed plot and violence and confined himself to advocacy.

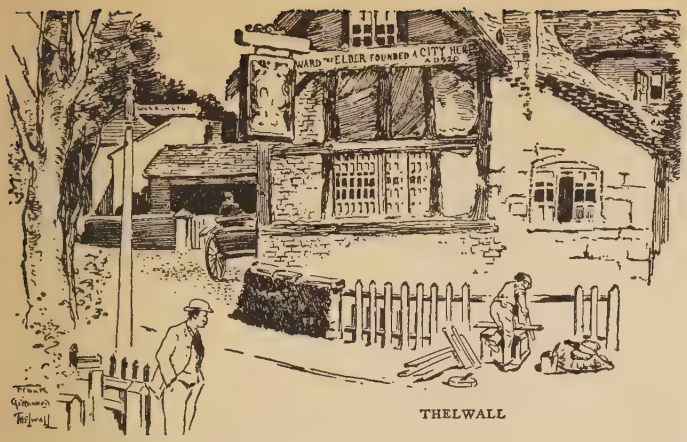
So forcible were his words that he became the Jacobite leader in Parliament ; so fearless was his attitude that he won admiration even from his opponents, including Walpole. Once he was sent to the Tower ; that was for daring to describe King George the First as " a stranger to our language and Constitution." He opposed the Septennial Bill, and he led a vigorous opposition against the Treaties of Vienna and of Hanover for the defence of his Majesty's German dominions.

The great triumph of Shippon's career was not in his actual achievements but in the recognition of the purity of his motives. " Whoever is corrupt, Shippon is not," said Walpole, and his word on that subject was authoritative. Shippon, respecting Walpole the actual enemy more than Pulteney the virtual friend, walked out of the House in 1741 when the former was in danger of censure, an act which thwarted the Opposition. Two years later he died, and a possible Prime Minister was lost. In his day his fame was perhaps above his merit ; in trying to adjust the balance posterity has rated him too low. It is the poet's line by

which he lives, and it restores him to his rightful place – just "honest Shippon."

Among humbler yet admirable heroes we must assuredly include Admiral Bach, who five times plunged into the Arctic region of mystery, and Robert Moffat, the gardener at High Legh, who went forth with missionary fervour into the dangerous gloom of Africa. And recalling once more that phrase "the seed-plot of gentilitie," may we not accentuate the fact that when Thackeray wished to select an example of what was truest and best, he named Reginald Heber as "one of the best of English gentlemen – the charming poet, the happy possessor of all sorts of gifts and accomplishments, birth, wit, fame, high character, competence, the beloved parish priest, counselling his people in their troubles, exhorting, encouraging, where there was strife the peacemaker, and where there was want the free giver" – praise from the heart for the hymn-writing son of the rector of Malpas who has left the most fragrant of memories in the county to which he belonged. Carlyle boldly asserted that it was a wrong to man that he liked

ease – " difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death," he said, " are the allurements that act on the heart." Cheshire warriors like Audley, Brereton, and Piers Legh – " that for King Richard the death did die betrayed for righteousness," as the brass in Macclesfield Church declares – these men who braved so much for conscience and cause, and men of parts like Leycester, Heber, Bradshaw, and Moffat, all helped to establish the truth of the sage's doctrine.



THELWALL

VI. TOWN HAUNTS AND THREE WICHES

IF London, as tradition hath it, owed her origin to the salt-traffic between this land and the Continent, then Cheshire may claim to be one of her creators. From the *wiches* straggled the old salt-route to the ford at Westminster where the pack-trains waited, and the fortified stockade grew into Lud's Town, destined to be an empire's capital. The three *wiches* of Cheshire, Northwich, Nantwich, and Middlewich, could be personified as the weird sisters. The ancient sorceries linger about them. They have their dark corners, their crooked lines, their furtive byways suggestive of sinister design.

Houses of bygone time, with crinkled timbers like racked joints, and small-paned windows like a multitude of glittering eyes, summon up ghostly memories. In Nantwich a whole thoroughfare seems to have toppled out of another age, and it is sheer grotesqueness to behold modern life moving within it. There should be Britons or Romans pacing the winding roads; flat-hatted Tudors, at the very latest, should be entering at the oaken doors.

As for Northwich, it transports us at once to a goblin-realm of topsy-turvydom, and the stranger who finds himself amidst the slanting structures has an impression at the outset of being involved in a crazy adventure. The natives are, of course, accustomed to walls askew, to sunken basements, squinting windows, and bulging roofs; they patiently shore-up their tumbling tenements, and make the crooked places straight; but the casual visitor is bewildered by thoughts of sudden collapse, is a little fearsome of writhing ironwork and cracks and gaps and yawns, and he does not care for brick edifices lopsided and out of focus. He may call upon a friend one week, and

the next week find the home deserted because the outer walls have broken or the ceiling slipped. An eerie sensation is produced that one day rickety Northwich will just fall to pieces like a cardboard structure in a fairy-tale.

It is not a place of cheerful aspect, but how can that be expected with its corroding cares? The brightest things soon turn black, and the strongest become dilapidated. Yet it is one of the oldest and most active and not least prosperous of the Cheshire industrial centres, and from the time of the Normans, and probably long before, the mines have been assiduously worked. Leland, in his day, termed Northwich "a prati market Towne, but fowle"; and prophet Nixon, always on the gloomy side, foretold that it would ultimately be destroyed by water, a possible though, it is hoped, remote contingency. All things duly observed and considered, the visitor is glad to escape from brooding perils and seek safety on the high road that leads through pleasant pastoral land to Chester.

It is the third of the *wiches* which presents a really baleful aspect. Nantwich and

Northwich, despite their contortions, are not devoid of attractiveness, the former with its dignified and massive church and its line of picturesque old timber dwellings, and the latter with its interesting quaintness and its valuable Library of old and modern county literature ; but Middlewich, if the truth must be bluntly told, is rather a hag unredeemed, uncouth, and disfavoured. She hoards secrets of the past, and she possesses grim memories. Nor is her dark visage to-day a discredit, for Middlewich knows the meaning of hard toil under conditions which give her little chance of any cheerful display. And as for history, was it not here that one of the sharpest of the struggles of the Civil War occurred when Brereton's men on a dull March Sunday in 1642 encountered the forces of Sir Thomas Aston, and " all the foote was wedged up in the church, like billets in a wood pile, not one man at his arms, trusting then only to the cannon to scoure the chiefe two streetes." The Royalist leader said that the enemy came down Dog Lane and advanced briskly upon the horse " who were in condition of sheepe in a penn, and quite

NANTWICH

exposed to slaughter." Aston escaped to Kinderton, but left behind many Royalist officers, four hundred of his men, and great quantity of arms; so that Brereton's victory was complete. And as we look at the narrow streets to-day with their sharp angles, and then at the old parish Church with its embattled and crocketed tower, we visualise that lugubrious scene of cruel slaughter which casts its shadow on the town's chronicles.

Northwich and Nantwich also have their stirring episodes of war as well as of trade. They were between the two fires and constantly in the throes of conflict. Nantwich was one of Brereton's garrisoned towns, and it withstood a severe siege, though the enemy shot into the town many great bullets red hot as fire. Long years before, this town of white salt, or Hellath Wen, as the Welsh traders called it (and Welsh Row preserves the reminiscence) had suffered much devastation; then, though history is vague, it returned to prosperity, and in Leland's time there were salt works to the number of three hundred. This was the zenith. Catastrophes came from fire

and plague upon the town, but its boast is, as a rhyming inscription on Thomas Cleese's black-and-white house affirms, that Elizabeth herself, "our ryal Queen," "put her helping hand to build this towne again." Once there was a castle near the Weaver, but its stones went to the making of the Church. So history jogs along, and to-day we see the past revealed in wonderful relics, the black-and-white edifices with sixteenth-century dates, carved and panelled, and with one rambling old hostelry, the Crown, which makes the adornment of a side street. But we always come back to the salt pits in the valley :

> Long since, before the Roman host
> In pomp of war old Cheshire crost,
> These pits our fathers labouring saw,
> The garner'd hoards from earth to draw.

In distinction from the white salt town was Heledd Ddu, the black salt town of Northwich, known to the Romans, fortified by the Saxons, part of the earldom of Chester, seeing the end of the Civil War at Winnington Bridge, and thus from period to period having its full share in peace,

industry, and strife. The three Cheshire *wiches* assuredly have their own romance, though the dark lines of tragedy are so often interwoven with it. They have priority of place for antiquity and uniqueness, but they have ceased to be of first importance.

Next to the capital, Stockport should perhaps be regarded as the chief town for its size and its many activities. But the historian does not find it a really fruitful study. Though dating far back, the records of Stockport are scanty, and practically nothing of interest or importance emerges until in the early part of the nineteenth century it began to thrive on cotton. The Romans, of course, found the site essential for an outpost fort to guard the Mersey. Four roads converged at this centre, one from Manchester, a second leading to Buxton, a third to Melandra Castle near Glossop, and a fourth to Castle Shaw in Saddleworth. On every side were dense forests. The Saxons built a castle, and the Normans rebuilt it ; it was a stronghold of the Earl of Chester until in the Civil War it was finally demolished. Colonel Dukinfield who held it for the Parliamentarians

was routed by Prince Rupert in 1644, but the victor did not remain in the town. The features of Stockport are the Parish Church of the fourteenth century and the Grammar School founded in 1482 by Sir Edmund Shaa and the Goldsmiths' Company of London.

But industry has a romance of its own, though it may seem drab, and the extraordinary rise of Stockport cannot be dismissed as a dull fact. It was the first place after Derby to erect silk mills of the Italian design; but silk was abandoned for the spinning, weaving, and doubling of cotton and the printing of calico. Everyone knows of the unhappy riots, fostered by ignorance and fear, which followed as a consequence of the inventions of Kay, Cartwright, and Crompton, when the workers saw in the new machinery their own ruin as operatives. Stockport became a scene of outrage and crime between 1810 and 1820, a hot battle-ground of employers and employed which did no little damage both to the name and the fortune of the town. But years brought reconciliation and progress, and this hilly hat-making town, with its gleaming factory

lights, its steep upper and lower parts, its surprising Great Underbank with the picturesque Hall of the Ardernes, its bridge under which the two converging rivers meet to make the Mersey, its high viaduct, its stone steps, its tiers of houses, makes as curious and interesting a spectacle as the lover of quaintness and irregularity could imagine. Ann Radcliffe, who visited the place in the eighteenth century, has supplied us with a graphic little vignette of the Cheshire panorama at sunset, " a scene of fertile plains and gentle heights," and she lingered awhile at Stockport when it was " crowded with buildings and people, as much so as some of the busiest quarters in London, with large blazing fires in every house, by the light of which women were frequently spinning, and manufacturers issuing from their workshops and filling the steep streets, which the chaise rolled down with dangerous rapidity."

The trains that rush through Stockport to Manchester and Liverpool have come from Crewe, that most remarkable of modern creations. Some fantastic lines which appeared in *Punch* years ago express the

common sentiment in regard to the mysterious place " born of the night, of Bradshaw, and of trains," looming large in the time-table, noisily asserting its active life, and yet, apart from its railway station and its

Monstrous engines thundering and ablaze,
Its criss-cross metals in a shining maze,
Its trains illumined sliding out and in,
And high-piled barrows charging through the din,

seeming to have no corporate existence.

Do folk alight and live at Crewe? How strange
To settle down where others come to change!

Crewe is a populous town, but it is still bewildering, a creation of the locomotive era, " passed through " by millions who know it not, approached, left behind, and then ceasing to be of human interest. When the Mechanised Age comes perhaps Crewe will be the first metropolis of the Robots. Its thousands of inhabitants are men at the great works, engine-drivers, electricians, millwrights; its buildings are sheds and smithies and shops; its prevailing sounds are of the furnace and hammer, mingled

with shriek and whistle of engines, the perpetual rush and rattle of wheels, the clangour of iron and steel. Wonderful and mysterious Crewe !

A puny village called Crewe existed before steam locomotion was dreamt of ; but the monsters came, breathed their hot breath into it, gave it tentacles, made it a roaring giant. Here we see lines winding, curving, bending, wriggling, starting suddenly for a new direction, losing themselves round mysterious corners, joining, sundering, running side by side, widening, contracting – was there ever such intricacy all turned magically to use and order as at Crewe ? We catch the gleam of the metals as they twist and glide and interlace and separate ; we see the platforms that spread ; we hear the blows of the hammer, the hiss of the furnace, the whistle of the syrens. There are spacious sheds like huge reservoirs in which leviathans spawn ; for here come to shape and motion monsters that will roll and thud and scurry away and be lost rapidly in distance. By night multitudinous green and red eyes blink and glare. The air is thick with rigid signals, like

sentinels, who silently demand, Who goes there? salute, chop the air with lank blades, and let the stranger pass. It is a place of mystery, where the caravanserai is unending, and where with a rattle, a scream, and clouds of smoke from burning nostrils, something comes, dashes out, vanishes, and we say – "The North Express!"

This Vulcan's home, a station and a workshop, is a paradox. It has its millions of visitors who never stay; it is a name, a token, and a sign to a vast multitude, but not a material fact except to the few; it is the railway metropolis, and in some of its aspects might seem to fulfil the prophecies of those who had visions of an era of machines. A mere village once, Church Coppenhall, its geographical position was such as to make it an important junction for the north and west, and it became a network of radiating lines, with straggling streets and workmen's dwellings beyond, a railway populace.

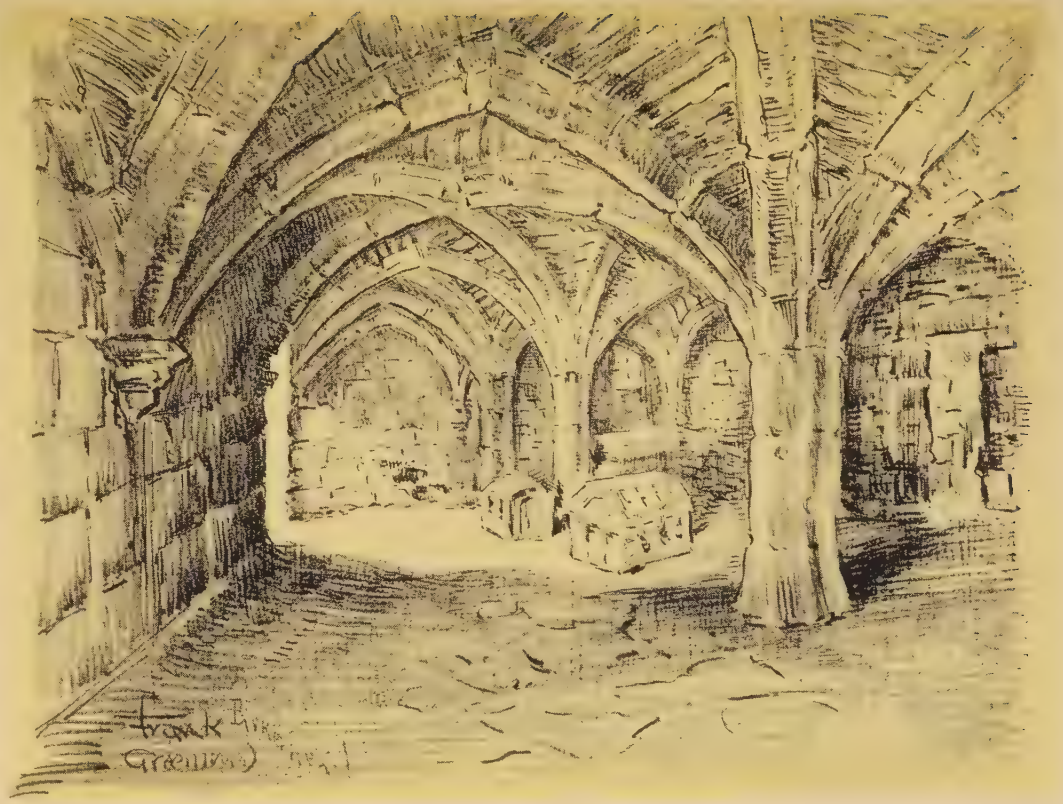
Not but what Crewe has its amenities, its municipal life, its recreations; and once out of the thraldom of rail, and beyond the iron-bound circle, you may find beauty and

romance in a typical Cheshire pastureland, and in the woodlands amid which stands the stately Hall associated with names great in national history. John Crewe, otherwise Baron Crewe of Stene, was one of Samuel Pepys's friends, and the diarist had the honour of dining with him and was "mightily made of"; returning the compliment and the hospitality he took his lordship and friends by coach to his own house, "where I treated them with good wine of several sorts, and they took it mightily respectfully." A fortnight or so later he again dispensed the honours – "I had six noble dishes for them dressed by a man cook. We eat with pleasure, and I enjoyed myself in it; eating in silver plates and all things mightily rich and handsome about me." Pepys paid tribute to the Crewes – "the best family in the world for goodness and sobriety."

The history of the Crewes belongs to the nation, and the bold but not wholly guileless part enacted by Sir Ranulph in the days when the Divine Right of Kings was stubbornly maintained is familiar to every schoolboy. When the War came, the

Royalists made Crewe Hall the object of a fierce assault, and there is a slope, known as Slaughter Hill, which commemorates by its name the fate of the garrison. But the Roundheads under Fairfax recaptured the place, which in time was to become famed as a stately home and a treasure-house of riches and resplendence.

Throughout the county there is a noticeable intermingling of old and new, the antique form showing beneath the modern garb. Sleepy places stir into clamorous life on market days, and enterprising towns sink back into archaic customs when anniversaries are rubricated in the calendar. Sweet Auburn suddenly becomes a busy mart. Towns like Stockport, Macclesfield, Congleton, Knutsford, Cheadle, Lymm, Prestbury, Runcorn, Sandbach, and Wilmslow, with all their progress have never dissevered themselves from precedent and tradition. You can still hear the Pancake Bell rung at Middlewich; you can find lingering fables and legends in the very heart of industry; and you can catch the sounds of dialect in the speech of educated citizens. Of late years, especially during



Birkenhead Priory: The Crypt

the past half-century, there have been rapid developments which have converted small hamlets into noisy and populous centres of commerce. Runcorn, once a "very poor village, with a fair church on the banks of the river," and hoarding relics of an ancient fortress and a monastery, is now a busy port. Birkenhead hides its historic old Priory in a dingy quarter and proudly displays its great docks and shipping. If memory be stirred it is of that episode of dubious morality and still more questionable advantage concerning the *Alabama* privateer which brought cotton from the blockaded Southern ports of America to the Lancashire and Cheshire mills, then imperilled by a shortage of material; she destroyed some sixty Northern ships until captured, nearly brought England and America to war, and provoked bitter litigation. It is a stirring but not an agreeable story. Among recently created towns are Dukinfield, a hive of business, Hoylake, a pleasure resort, and New Brighton which is to Cheshire, on smaller scale, what Blackpool is to Lancashire. And there is Port Sunlight, the garden-village which represents

the ideal of a commercial magnate gifted with imagination, a trim, bright, well-planned, healthy, and attractive cynosure of workers' homes, with its Art Gallery, its schools, its recreation grounds, and its useful institutions, providing a practical proof that Blake's vision of a Jerusalem in this fair and pleasant English land need not remain wholly a chimera of the poet.

LOWER PEOVER

VII. OLD CHURCH LORE

AMONG the devout, the name to conjure with in Cheshire is that of Saint Werburgh, daughter of King Wolfere of Mercia, and Superioress of a religious community. Not only in the cathedral city but in humble spots where the spire of the little church rises amid a small group of homesteads her pious life and deeds are commemorated. The foundation of her monastery marks an epoch in the history of religion in the region where the Roman had reared his temples and the Saxon had set up his idols. Christianity progressed as her followers continued her

mission. The Cistercians became a dominating power in Norman times; Hugh Lupus gave them the Manor of Ynes, or Ince, Stanlow Abbey arose, and Combermere Abbey near a lovely sheet of water took shape a century later. But there are far earlier memorials than these of the conversion of the people, and for the deepest interest, mingled with not a little baffling mystery, we have to turn to Sandbach with its remarkable Crosses.

Sanbec, as the town was originally called, was a Saxon village of the Mercians. Priests from King Penda of Northumbria travelled afoot to spread the Gospel tidings. Among the converts was his son Peada, and on his homeward way from the pious pilgrimage he halted at Sandbach, and raised the great stone Crosses with their carvings depicting scenes in the life of his Master, Christ. The sides of the monoliths face exactly north, south, east, and west, and the sun (that is, the Sun of Righteousness) is seen near the base of the larger obelisk. Figures of men and animals can be plainly traced among the undulating lines and interspersed branches, and one scene obvi-

The Crosses at Sandbach

ously depicts the descent of the Holy Ghost as conceived by the primitive mind. On the smaller obelisk is a representation of Peada's conversion, baptism, and marriage, for the history is interwoven with a love romance in which Oswi, a Northumbrian Princess, shines out as heroine and evangelist.

The Crosses are dated back to so remote a period as 653. They did not escape the fury of the iconoclastic Reformers, and were cast down and broken. When, in 1816, restoration was undertaken under the inspiration of Ormerod, antiquary and historian, fragments were found in houses, in gardens, in wells, and in the pavements; they even formed part of doorsteps. They were collected by the loving labour of the people, and to-day stand again in the cobbled square, unique, imposing, and a source of wonder.

Thus we trace Christianity in Cheshire back to early Saxon times, and this is not the sole evidence. Warburton, whose name is derived from Werburgh, has a Saxon origin, though its wattle and daub church is twelfth century; Prestbury shows remains

which are held to be Saxon; and Great Budworth, lying between two meres, was "Bode's dwelling-place by the water," and its church is decidedly of a pre-Conquest period, though in its present form Norman, with a characteristic stunted tower, and with grotesque carvings, some of affrighting mien, which constitute an unusual interior decoration.

The "daughter of the ancient mother-church of St. Budworth" was at that most picturesque of villages, Nether (or Lower) Peover; and the Churchwardens' Book of 1698 records that it was erected in the reign of Henry III and dedicated to St. Oswald, 1296, "whose Feast of Dedication, commonly called the Wakes, was celebrated yearly on the fifth day of August through this Parish," Oswald's great battle day, when he was slain by Penda the pagan King of Northumbria. And "unto this Oswald, Bede, in his history of England, ascribeth many miraculous stories, who, being a pious king, and dying in defence of the Christian Religion, was canonised for a Saint, and afterwards were many churches and chapels founded in honour of him." This edifice is

one of the few specimens left of ecclesiastical structures in wood and plaster, the red sandstone of the ancient square tower being the only stone employed. The air of antiquity is maintained inside by the oaken box pews, the tombs and brasses of the great families, a chained Book of Homilies, and a massive iron-bound chest to which the tradition belongs that in olden time no Cheshire girl was fit wife for a Cheshire yeoman unless she had the strength to raise and throw back the lid – a feat, by the way, that in these apparently degenerate times, even the most stalwart man cannot achieve.

The Church abounds in memorials and chapelries to the noble and famous families of the locality, heroes in war, leaders in the State – the Shakerleys, Mainwarings, Cholmondeleys, and De Tableys. But the weirdest of all mementoes is the wooden model of a man's hand nailed to the wall – the hand that is "never to grow old" because it is none other than that of King Oswald, famed for dispensing his charity to a band of beggars who knocked at the door of the royal hall, giving them a golden goblet at parting, and receiving the blessing

of the monk Aidan with the prophecy that the charitable hand should ever retain vitality. In which legend the virtuous will find the occult moral. Not but what the "Cheshire Hand" may have a more prosaic interpretation, and be merely the glove hung outside the churches at fair-time when non-freemen were privileged to trade within the cities without restriction.

The history of the strikingly beautiful little Church is closely bound up with the history of the eventful times of the Civil War, as well as with the landed families who distinguished themselves. There are curious links also with the Grosvenors, descendants of Hugh Lupus, one of whom made unsuccessful claim to a coat of arms and incurred the ridicule of no less a person than Geoffrey Chaucer. The coat was awarded to his rival Richard Scrope, though Grosvenor was granted permission to carry one of another design; but this ancestor of the Grosvenors of Eaton rejected it – "scorninge to beare the other coat with a difference." Another proud character, but of nobler type, was Richard Comberbach, ejected for refusing to take the oath of

allegiance to William of Orange when he became king; but, betaking himself to farming, and prospering thereat, he dispensed his wealth in philanthropy, and his best memorial can be seen in the Bread Shelves bearing the inscription: "Blessing and Bread to the Poor for ever. R. C. 1722."

The neighbouring Church of Over Peover, dating from Henry VII's time, likewise has special interests, and its tombs are remarkable. There are two private chapels, one of them having been erected by Randle Mainwaring in 1456 for himself and his wife. Under an arch with a canopy is an alabaster slab on which their figures are laid – the Knight in a "complete suit of plate armour, with peaked shoes and spurs, the feet resting on a lion, the joints of the armour inlaid with jewels and foliage, the sword-belt richly ornamented with trefoils in front of which is an inscription, and over it a wreath richly decorated with rosettes and foliage."

If we are still in quest of strange relics, we can discover yet another in Mellor Church where there is a quaintly sculptured

font of Saxon or Norman date with its mysterious and inexplicable markings – a hunting scene, say some antiquaries, and a Scripture illustration, say others ; but the acutest conjecture has been made by a local antiquary, Mr. J. E. McDonald, who after comparing it with figures on a font at Winchester declared that the figures are of two salamanders, the Holy Ghost, and Christ riding into Jerusalem, and represent the meaning of the passage in St. Matthew, " He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." In the same Church is a black pulpit which it was long surmised had been cut out of the solid trunk of an oak ; but later and more expert examination goes to show that nature herself shaped it, and that it was fashioned from the face of a hollow trunk.

The archæologist, the antiquary, the artist, and the pilgrim alike find in Cheshire churches something for study and meditation, something to please the vision and feed the mind. They may wander to Astbury and admire the pointed arches, the clustered pillars, the painted windows, and the traceries ; to Wilmslow where the

Wilmslow from the Railway

embattled tower glooms darkly over the hollow, and wherein may be seen ancient tombs and recumbent figures; to Marton, near Congleton, where the half-timbered building with its strangely shaped steeple stands upon a lonely eminence and seems to belong to nowhere; to Bunbury, not far from Beeston, where are historic chapelries, and a monument to that old sea-dog Sir George Beeston of Armada fame. Or they may make their way to the Wirral where a sturdy square-towered church, like that at Neston, takes them back to early Norman days, and recalls a series of vicissitudes through the ages, for it was bought back at high price, and then in Reformation times so battered and bespoiled as "to be reduced to the chilling respectability of a Quaker meeting house." At Weaverham will be found a Church which has almost become a museum, with its twelfth-century horn-book, its register of vicars (from 1299) and four centuries of churchwardens' accounts, its exquisite Chippendale table, and even a bit of old Roman road which dribbles through the churchyard. At Warburton (the Wareburgtune of Domesday Book)

a pilgrim will linger long to gaze upon an antique form sombrely austere, and to examine the timbers of the roof, and the great oak pillars upholding it. Nor must Bebington be passed unregarded if it only be to verify the truth of Washington Irving's tribute that "it completely answered my idea of what such a thing was as the old English village church."

Perhaps a rival choice would be far-off Barthomley in the south, where the Church, reached by winding steps, stands high above the white cottages with their luxurious gardens, in one of the serenest corners of the county. Haunted as it is by the tragic memory of the massacre in the days of the Civil War, it is now a very shrine of peace and of goodwill. It has its strange relics, including a mysterious Devil's Doorway; it has its Saxon carvings and its Norman porch; it has its Elizabethan oak screen. There are ancient memorials and ornate chapelries, and the bell in the tower still tolls the curfew. We can read how, in laudable imitation of his betters, a certain Joseph Bleamire, "coachman to John Crewe, Esq.," left by his last will and testa-

GAWSWORTH FROM THE AVENUE

ment in 1760 " the sum of sixty pounds the interest of which to be laid out weekly in brown bread to the value of two pence per loaf and to be distributed in the Parish Church of Barthomley every Sunday immediately after morning service to the poor of the township of Crewe " – all of which is set forth on a tablet with a great profusion of capitals and a notable absence of stops. Consoling it is to know that this sweet spot in Cheshire, rich in mead and bowers, a perfect corner-picture with the church on the hillock, is a centre of many benefactions, and that the horror of a past episode is atoned for.

When these shrines have been exhausted, there still remain two churches arresting in their gemlike attraction and in their history. These are Gawsworth and Prestbury. No one can come upon Gawsworth without feeling that he has suddenly been transported into a region of enchantment, with its old-fashioned English beauty, its typical sixteenth-century houses, and its peaceful church whose shadows are reflected in the silent pools beneath. It is environed by relics which have been so well preserved

that they still gleam freshly out of their old-time frames. The Old Hall is one of the most attractive of edifices, and by its side is a walled-in Green containing a number of curious grassy mounds popularly spoken of as the Tilt Yard, though it may have been a hanging garden or pleasure ground such as was known in the days of the Tudors. The Rectory, dating back to the fifteenth century, with its quaint black-and-white exterior, ranks among the most charming of Gawsworth's features, and it would be easy to imagine it as the chosen sanctuary of a religious poet and recluse of the type of George Herbert.

The Church records go back to the twelfth century. On the west side of the porch is a curious carving representing a rose with two heads enclosed in the petals, indicating that the porch was erected about 1486, or soon after the union of the Houses of York and Lancaster. Within the chancel are altar-like monuments dating from 1608 and 1650, erected to the memory of members of the Fitton family. Beneath the effigy of Sir Francis Fitton is a representation in marble of his skeleton from which the skull

has gone. On another tomb lie the recumbent figures of an earlier member of the family and his wife, with an image of their daughter Dorothy, who died in childhood. She is clad in a simple dark dress and white apron, and her little hands are meekly folded in the attitude of prayer. Opposite are two other striking altar monuments. One represents Sir Edward Fitton, the first Baronet, and his lady, with their three sons and seven daughters carved on a smaller scale, humbly kneeling on a step below their august parents. Two of the sons are in clerical-looking cloaks; the third is in armour, and has lost his head. A slab let in the wall with an elaborate epitaph records the deeds of the departed, and an incongruous pun is noted in the final couplet:

Whose soule's and body's beauties sentence them
FITTONS to weare a heavenly Diadem.

Few are the English villages which have so many charms packed into small compass as has Gawsworth, or so many historic associations, or so quaint and varied a collection of personal traditions. Even the

yew-trees have a special fame, for they are mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086.

Along the broad road from Stockport we pass the flat emerald expanses of garden land at Poynton and Bramhall, reach the border of softly rising hills, and so forward to Adlington, with its Hall embosomed in trees, and on to Prestbury which may be regarded as one of the most fascinating mediæval relics in the country. For here we get back to Roman, Saxon, and Norman of distinct stages, and each of them picturesque and beautifully preserved – indeed, the Norman decorative porch and arches are treasures in ancient stone which leave us in wonderment. The decorations seem to tell how the artist loved his work and lingered over it. The Norman Chapel with its glorious arch and its elaborate carvings is a feast for the antiquary's eyes. In the churchyard is an eighth-century Saxon portion of a cross commemorating, it is believed, the first preaching of Christianity in the place. The fragments were found, a little less than a century ago, embedded in the walls of the Church, where they had been concealed

PRESTBURY

and unknown for at least four hundred years. The Church itself, beautifully situated amidst ancient trees, dates to the twelfth century, and was a possession of the monks of St. Werburgh; it is rich in monumental slabs, and might almost be termed the mausoleum of the great families of Legh and Newton and Warren. This Preast-bury, or dwelling of the priests, would have appealed to the heart of a poet such as Longfellow, who could have rhymed of its old-world houses with their black-and-white timbers and fantastic windows, and have recalled the stories of the ages during which the old Church has cast a soft shadow on the green land which dips down to the babbling Bollin river.

BRAMHALL HALL

VIII. STORIED STONE AND WOOD

THE feudal system so long prevailed in Cheshire, incursions were so frequent, warfare was so continuous, that of necessity the whole region was strongly fortified and ringed with castles. The nobles and the landed families were in possession; stone towers marked the centre of their dominion; and when, as the saying went, every gentleman had his park, stately half-timbered mansions arose, often moated, which were both homes and strongholds. Many of these distinctive buildings have a history from Elizabethan times, and not a few are associated with the names of owners who rendered service to the Tudors and Stuarts. Record has already been made of the

deeds of the Leghs, Ardens, Vernons, Warrens, De Traffords, Masseys, and Breretons, names that light up history, and the proud bearers of which not infrequently boasted a lineage before the coming of the Conqueror.

Domesday Book tells of a certain Hamo de Masci who held "Bramhale," and "Brun and Hacon formerly held it for two manors and were free men." In Edward the Confessor's time it was valued at thirty-two shillings, "and is now five shillings," a sad decline; "and the Earl of Chester found it waste." A concrete and not very favourable account is this of one of the beauty-spots of Cheshire, the seat of the Davenports for centuries, and embellished with one of the perfect examples of magpie architecture, the fifteenth-century Hall which looks from its terrace over spacious verdure towards Lyme Hills. The windows, which twinkle out amidst the black-and-white framework, are remarkable for the variety and the beauty of the designs of their leaden tracery.

Like most of these old family residences of the Cheshire magnates, Bramhall was

a centre of adventure in the Civil War, and Davenport, who was a Royalist, had to pay a fine of £750 for offending the Parliament faction. The last of the pedigree involved the beautiful old home in some disgrace, and the dismantling of the Hall in 1877 aroused both pity and censure. "An act of vandalism and an irreparable loss," was the commentary of a writer of the time, "that one of the oldest and best preserved of English houses has been broken up, and that its removal is a distinct loss both as a source of active knowledge of the past and a source of noble inspiration in the present. Like the stretching roots and the luxuriant foliage of a noble old oak, this Hall, which has been shelter to many generations, and whose traditions may be re-traced until they are lost in distance, is the work of centuries, both of preservation and escape." And an incongruous scene was described – the auctioneer and the brokers and the bargain-hunters in the rooms, the hansom cabs and spring-carts in the park, bottles and sandwiches on the antique tables; books at hucksters' prices, and "the harp

which had hitherto known none but love-strains twanged by the auctioneer's men to fetch an extra half-guinea." A sorry enough scene, in good sooth, and the result of the sad lapse of the Davenport fortunes, the family which had at one time had supreme rule of the Forest, and whose grim armorial bearings of a halter round a felon's neck was a reminder of their former power to ordain death for offenders.[1]

A story more worthy of ancient tradition is to be told of Halton Castle. The rock on which it originally stood was surrounded by townships named after the cardinal points, Norton, Sutton, Easton, Weston, indicating their relative positions

[1] The *Athenæum* referring to the painful "succumbing to circumstances" of the mediæval black-and-white timber and plaster house, found a disheartening reflection in the fact that "it had been reserved for the representative of an old Cheshire family in the nineteenth century to sell the estate of his ancestors." And then there were sordid details: "A splendid piece of old tapestry, containing thirty-three coats of arms, and showing the alliances of the Davenport family for generations, was allowed to be sold for the paltry sum of £25. It can be proved to have been worked between the years 1550 and 1579, and is probably the finest piece of tapestry in the Kingdom. A bed with hangings of curiously worked needlework, depicting Adam and Eve in Paradise and the fall of Man, with a large inscription, stating that it was worked in the year 1610 by Dame Dorothy Davenport, went for £150," and so on. Parallels were inevitably made to the behaviour of Charles Surface when he knocked down the family portraits.

to the central fortress of the Normans. On a neighbouring rock at Runcorn, a stronghold had been raised in Saxon times by Elfrida, daughter of Alfred the King, as protection against the Danish pirates who sailed past the deserted shore where Liverpool has since arisen, and landed their booty in the valley below. But it was not until the Conqueror handed over all Cheshire to Hugh Lupus, "to hold by him as freely by the sword as he himself held the realm of England by the crown," that real history was made in this locality. Lupus divided his territory among eight fellow-soldiers, his barons who were pledged to support him with their swords.

Baron Halton was Robert Nigel, builder of the castle; others who followed him achieved fame in the Crusades and in Scotland and France, and one signed the Charta at Runnymede. John of Gaunt was Lord of Halton in 1360, and Henry Bolingbroke, fifteenth in succession, was the last. In 1579, "that once proud castle," says the historian Beaumont, "long the head of a barony and the chief abode of the Constables of Chester, which had given thrones

Moreton Old Hall: The Gatehouse

to its possessors, declined from its state, and was transformed into a prison for recusants under the governorship of Sir John Savage." James the First, the guest of Sir John at Rock Savage, hunted and killed a buck in the park in 1617; but the last stage in the history of Halton was a defeat of the garrison who tried to hold it for King Charles in the Civil War. It passed into the hands of the Parliamentarians, was dismantled, and reduced to ruin in 1644.

A curiosity is presented by the village library at Halton, founded by Sir John Chesshyre expressly for the use of men of letters and divines placed in a rural corner where men of letters were not to be found and where divines were rare. Sir John, born in 1661 at Halwood, the family seat near Halton, was the King's sergeant-at-law, and his fee-book shows that he enjoyed an exceptionally large income. He died suddenly, when entering his coach, at the age of seventy-seven; but five years previously, in 1733, he had established the library "pro communi literatorum usu." His rules provided that learned men were

to be so encouraged to advance their knowledge "by a friendly communication in their studies and works" that "any divines or other gentlemen, and particularly the Chesshyres and their heirs, could on application to the curate have access and resort to the library every Tuesday and Thursday in the year." It was thus the first free village library established in England, but almost unknown and seldom used. It contained 422 folio volumes of theology and history ranged in presses round the walls of a single room.

Another Hall of long and honourable history is that at Adlington, a picture of old magpie architecture. It existed in 1581, may have been begun in 1505, and is the ancestral home of the Leghs. In the time of the first Edward there was here a four-square shelter in the densely covered forest. The mansion is the work of many hands at various periods, and its black-and-white is a charming spectacle. The Hall played a brave though minor part in the time of the Civil Wars, when the staunch Royalist garrison of 149 men, under Thomas Legh, defied the cannon of

Adlington Hall

the Roundheads and held out against a siege of fourteen days.

The largest and most ornate room in 1611 had its walls covered with no fewer than a hundred and eighty heraldic shields, "the Armes of Gyentlemen as they be placed over the Chimeney"; but a more sentimental interest is provided by the fact that the organ here shown, supported by lofty oak pillars carved from the solid trees, was touched by Handel's own fingers, and it is even fabled that the clinking hammer at Hollingworth smithy enabled him to catch the inspiration for his immortal melody of the *Harmonious Blacksmith.* Be that as it may, the musician's manuscript can be seen in its frame on the wall, a lasting souvenir of his visit and one of its results. Beyond the Hall lies the delightful sylvan covert, open glades and sheltering avenues alternating, called in caprice the Wilderness; and the pathways lead onward to Prestbury.

The Leghs are found again at Lyme Hall, near Disley, that typical abode of ancient power and dignity, crowded with relics, including some of pathetic interest

connected with the martyred Charles; the gloves he wore on the scaffold are religiously preserved, and the chairs in the Stag Parlour are covered with parts of his black cloak. The Hall looks over sweeping uplands crested with Lime Cage, a former hunting box, and from its windows a vista of lovely garden can be viewed. Scattered about the Park are a number of old oaks which might have been growing in the fourteenth century when Richard II granted "Hawley within the forest of Macclesfield" to Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Dangers, and her third husband, Piers de Legh, for the service her father had rendered at Creçy; for the grant contains specific reference to the oaks upon the land. Lyme was situated on the "lymes" or border of the county, the Goyt separating the Macclesfield Forest from that of the Peak. The whole region was woodland, a fact to be traced in the names of localities which so frequently end in "hurst." But Disley's origin is untraceable, though it is surmised it may be Celtic, "dws," "ooze," and "lle," the place of springs.

The most noted show-place in Cheshire

Moreton Old Hall: The Courtyard

is Little Moreton Hall, which goes back to the days of bluff King Hal, and is perhaps the one perfect specimen of black-and-white in the whole land. Quite in keeping with its charm and its traditions it bears upon the timbers of the Great Hall the jovial verse :

When the trees are white with rime,
And the ground is black and bare,
Warmth and welcome ye shall finde
Underneath these gables faier.
Charitie and jolitie
Carve on every beam of wood,
Mercy, truth, equalitie,
Man's eternal brotherhood.

Yet another carving on the solid oak tells us in quaintest phraseology :

God is al in al thing
This Windows whir
made by William Moreton
in the yeare of oure Lorde MDLIX
Richarde Dale carpender made
Thies Windows by the grac of God.

Amid the wonderful woodwork by this Richard Dale, and in the Courtyard of

excelling beauty, and in the Long Room where the feet of Queen Bess may have tripped in the dance, we are made to feel ourselves transported to that old-time Merrie England on which legend and poetry have cast their glamour and worked their spell. It is indeed easy to conjure up visions of jollity, revel, hospitality, and splendour, as we stand in the spacious chambers, walk the long corridors, and gaze out of the superbly fashioned windows over the fair and fragrant fields. Eaton Hall and Crewe Hall may, of course, display greater riches, but they were not created in the same spirit as was Little Moreton Hall, breathing of the past, suggesting so much by its Gate House, its effigies, its antique furniture, and its mottoes, not the least striking of which is "The Speare of Destinye Whose Ruler is Knouledge" borne by a painted figure at the end of the Gallery. A place for dream and musing, a place delectable to the sight, a place which serves as casket for the jewels of old time.

The moated home of the Ardens, near Bredbury, with its thick stone walls and

Brereton Hall and Church

mullioned windows, also hoards a history of centuries connected with a family which traces back its origin to the time of King John. Of the Elizabethan Hall little now remains, but some of the stirring events in which it was involved are recalled by such names in the vicinity as Battle Hill and the Bloody Pits.

Our thoughts dwell awhile upon Brereton Hall, with its massive frontage looking as if the sturdy walls could withstand the stoutest of sieges, held for five hundred years by the great family with the bear's head as crest, descended from Ralph, and giving a good account of themselves as knights and barons in the service of their country; and upon sturdy Handforth Hall where dwelt the valorous Puritan warrior, Cheshire's village Hampden, the carved inscription on oak on the porch relating how it was "buylded in the yeare of oure Lord God, mccccclxii, by Uryan Breretoun, Knight." We think, too, of sturdy Peckforton, with its portcullis, keep, and towers; of Ridley and its associations with Egerton who bore the standard for Henry VIII; of fifteenth-century Chorley with its wains-

cotted rooms; of Wythenshawe in the park-like region, now a gracious gift to the citizens of Manchester; of Norton Priory, with its thrilling record of a desperate siege; of Lawton Hall, where fugitive Prince Charles found a timely refuge; and of Thurstaston Manor House with its underground passage and mysterious ghost. Whether the Hall, as it is now called, derived its name from pagan Thor, or from some simple Norse Thurstane who farmed the land, none can decide. In the vicinity is a huge isolated rock of red sandstone which is the greatest mystery of all, for no one can tell how it got there, and whether it was an altar for heathen sacrifice or just one of nature's capricious phenomena. A pleasant place of residence is the old Hall now, in the midst of country retaining old-world charm and peace.

In the long catalogue of castle and hall we mainly find those that enacted a stirring part in war, though to-day they may command notice solely by the beauty of the pictures they create in their ruin and desolation. Such an one is Beeston Castle, whose broken Saracen tower on the hill

HANDFORTH HALL

strikes heavily against the horizon, most famed of all in Cheshire chronicles, and most rent. But there are spots where names alone persist, though once, as mound and earthwork and crumbling stone attest, the massive work of men's hands was erected. Who shall tell now of vanished Bucton, Wheelock, Kelsborrow, Bromborough, Eddisbury, Twemlow, and Shocklach? Cloud castles that form and float and dissolve above the sites are not more substantial than the walls and towers which mingle with the dust and grass where Briton and Celt had their hour of life and combat, and passed away almost as if they had never been.

THE DEE AT FARNDON

IX. SLEEPY HOLLOWS AND QUIET WATERS

A SYMPATHETIC and appreciative American writer, some years ago on a visit to England, wrote that two features of our scenery which absorbed the mind and fulfilled the dreams of the traveller were the rustic loveliness of the land and the charm of its always vital and splendid antiquity. He instanced as characteristic the green lanes, the thatched cottages, the meadows glorious with wild flowers, the little churches covered with dark green ivy, the Tudor gables festooned with roses, the devious footpaths winding across wild heaths and

long and lonesome fields, the narrow shining rivers brimful to their banks and crossed with grey moss-grown bridges, the stately trees, the turf of emerald velvet, the fragrant woods, and the shady places where rest the sheep and deer. All of which might have been a pen-picture of the idyllic Cheshire region, a region which justifies the further statement that these typical English scenes have a secret and all-pervading charm and power, " the charm and power to soothe."

Cheshire, outside its comparatively few towns, is quiet and reposeful, with long stretches of greenery, deep woodlands, lonely hills, and slowly-moving rivers. The nature-lover finds much for allurement and contemplation in its flowers, wild growths, and birds. You come to dreamy spots where Spenser might have imagined a Castle of Indolence, and when we remember that John Milton found a wife in Cheshire we like to think that he could have fitted some of his murmurous lines in *Comus* or *Il Penseroso* to the unprofaned coverts, and to the russet lawns and fallows grey where the silence is only broken by the drowsy

hum of bees, and the trill and twitter of birds, and the soft low of cattle in distant fields – a scene indeed for

> Thyrsis, whose artful strains have oft delay'd
> The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
> And sweeten'd every musk-rose of the dale.

The very names of some of these Cheshire sanctuaries fall musically upon the ear – Marple, Budworth, Alderley, Rostherne, Alvanley, Rainow, Winsford, Ringway, and Delamere; and how felicitously do they accord with the

> Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver mist,
> Farms, granges, doubled up among the hills.

Legends are strewn freely about this enchanted region. The dim tradition of King Arthur and his sleeping knights and the white horses in waiting is found at the cave of wizardry on Alderley Edge. Or you reach a town like Knutsford, with its thousand years of lore, and still feel, despite some modern stir and rousing, that you are amid the fantasies of far-off days. At one time you walk along the narrow pathways

ALDERLEY EDGE FROM THE CARRS

and cobbled streets, pass red-brick Georgian mansions, glance at a stately hostelry where Thackeray would have loved to set the scene for a county ball ; and next, you are in the midst of Moorish buildings whose slender towers peep out from the woodland. The wide main highway skirts an extensive heath where May-time revels are held ; and near and overlooking it are the old residences of the *Cranford* populace, gentle and simple, haughty dames, decayed aristocracy, and humble tradesfolk, as depicted in their pathos and humour by the inimitable artist, Mrs. Gaskell. The square-towered Church on the hill, the quaint Unitarian Chapel in the hollow, and the grim square gaol now passing from ancient usage to meet modern requirements, have long added their distinctive touch to Knutsford's features ; and perhaps in no other part of the world is so curious a mixture to be found, this antique patchwork with its bits of Old England and of Granada which would have pleased the eye – perchance – of Washington Irving.

Romance has intermingled with history, and there are sceptics of the much-beloved

tale that Canute forded the little river Birken and left his name as a memorial. But there is genuine antiquity enow at Knutsford without doubtful claims, and olden names of renown cluster about it, the Tableys (or Leycesters), the Shakerleys, the Cholmondeleys (who produced the litigious " bold Ladye of Cheshire "), and the Grosvenors. By long winding lanes, rich in greenery, you reach remote and delectable haunts far from the noise and smoke of town, and realise that this is indeed " Old England," with timbered churches, thatched cottages, rambling farms and barns, primitive schools and institutions.

And for companion, over the wild stretch of hills beyond Macclesfield, lies Gawsworth, with the wonderful black-and-white dwellings and the imposing church fabric, typical monuments of departed greatness. Gawsworth is a place of pilgrimage, and wherever the visitor wanders he finds something to attract the eye and to excite the imagination. If he enters the Church he beholds curious monuments of antiquity, or he may gaze with intense interest upon the mural paintings which illustrate, in so

remarkable a manner, the religious fervour and fantasy of a past age. One inscription in particular arrests attention, and conjures up an important drama in which a noted leader had chief place. This is the monument to the second and last baronet, Sir Edward Fitton, who

" ended the most ancient race of Fittons and completed it, the last and the first, so the Fates decreed. Of a truth, in order that he might add the finishing touch to the ancient splendour of his line, he united in himself the virtues and renown of all, dignity, strength, comeliness of body, brilliancy, fidelity, and uprightness of mind. This [position] came to him naturally, because he was brought up in the lap of peace, but when involved in the furies of war, no one thundered more loudly or dealt more nobly in warlike matters, in which he had no experience. By Charles (most blessed martyr), he was appointed a commander, and he remained faithful to him in his troubles and dangers, and brought him welcome assistance with no mean forces, first at Edgehill, where on a bloody day, as commander of the Royal Artillery he shattered the rebel squadrons with his artillery fire ; afterwards at Banbury, Brainford, Reading, and in many other places, never without praise or renown, together

with his own Cheshire men, he behaved most bravely. At length, at Bristol, the city being taken, and he victorious, alas, he fell ! "

The unique epitaph proceeds to tell of his marriages, of his death, and lastly of his extraordinary burial at Bristol :

" There his faithful heart, his brain, and soft entrails are buried, in a fragile urn in the Church of St. Peter. The rest of his body was first buried at Oxford, on account of warlike disturbances, and thence at length, after an interval of twenty years, unbroken and unharmed, it was brought here. He rests, as he wished, in the bosom of his most loved Gawsworth. Let posterity honour him."

Literary students know that in theory Mary Fitton, daughter of Sir Edward, born in 1578, and a maid of honour at the Court of Queen Elizabeth, was none other than the " dark lady " of Shakespeare's sonnets. There is, however, no proof whatever that Shakespeare and this lady ever met, or that the highly-placed dame would have been in the slightest degree likely to devote any attention to a despised actor. She was already pledged to the Earl of

Old Bowdon

Pembroke, and it is only on the assumption that the poet would have been willing to debase himself that we can assume he either gave his love to, or received love in return from, Mary Fitton. Historical facts are further against the theory, inasmuch as it is clearly shown from the portrait at Arbury Castle in Warwickshire that Mary Fitton was not a " dark " lady at all, and in no wise corresponded to the description of the woman of the sonnets.

But we have by no means done with these relics which imbue Cheshire with so much romantic charm. Overlooking the peaceful Bollin Valley, the old Church of Bowdon has risen since Domesday times, and if you stand in the sloping churchyard with its thousand-year-old yew, you may get a glorious view of Dunham Park thick with foliage, and the feathery woods in the midst of which starts up the tower of Rostherne Church. Enter the Park with its patriarchal trees – the chestnuts with their gnarled boles, the long avenue of stately beeches, the oaks, the pines – and you realise the truth of the poet's words that the groves were God's

first temples, for here indeed nature seems to have created her cathedral. The ancestral home of the Earl of Stamford and Warrington, a treasure-house of art, fitly completes the picture.

And then, for contrast, there is Marple, half Cheshire and half Derbyshire, with its rocky heights and sharp declivities, and the ancient bridge spanning the noisy Goyt, and the so-called "Roman" lakes. Here side by side are two churches, the older structure disused, but its grey old tower is a landmark and its height serves for outlook over Strines Vale which is a tapestry of every shade of green. And there are glorious woods, having for background a crescent-like stretch of hills beginning with Werneth Low and ending with Lyme Hills, the long lonely line of Kinder Scout framing the whole scene with a dark border. Nature in a mood of playful disorder has disported herself at Styal, where a deep clough intersects the wood, scoured out by the Bollin water which scurries in the depths; and there are labyrinthine pathways through woods and round cliffs, leading suddenly to bright

spots of garden-land, or opening out on to terraces from which a glorious panorama can be surveyed. A mill, founded by Samuel Greg in 1784, and bearing his name, secretes itself in the seclusion of the valley and is coeval with the introduction of cotton-spinning into this part of the country. It was worked by the rushing little Bollin before steam was employed as a motive power. The whole locality is an Eden, bright with flowers, breathing odour; the river, overhung with willows, ripples its unceasing song; the little white cottages, models of their kind, peer out from the winding roads, and the fine Hall of the Gregs dominates from the midst of the patriarchal trees.

Or, again for change, you may slip along the devious pathways to Lymm and to Great Budworth, and in a road-side hostelry which looks as if it were made to illustrate a Dickens romance, you will find it was once on a time visited by that ranting, rhyming rogue, Drunken Barnaby, and that underneath an oil painting is his Latin verse which has thus been Englished:

> There's a Cock at Budworth where I
> Drunk strong Ale as brown as berry,
> Till at length with deep healths felled
> To my bed I was compelled,
> I for state as bravely sorted,
> By two porters was supported,

and if you do not believe him, there is the scene depicted as from life. Pity, perhaps, that this peregrinating poet was not cooled and corrected of his ways in the ancient stocks which have stood so many centuries outside the Church. Cheshire parts with its relics reluctantly, and preserves them as well as she can. Warburton Church has its roof secured with the timbers that were taken from a demolished hall; and there is a charming modern house in Wilmslow that can boast that amid its red bricks run the timbers from the quaint Poet's Corner wherein Edwin Waugh and Critchley Prince had their nightly gossip and sang their dialect songs.

A scene which Dickens himself might have loved for one of his "Out of the Season" sketches is provided by Parkgate, once a part of some stirring business, a fashionable suburb of Neston, with a long

"Poet's Corner" re-built

promenade, and boasting of a theatre or assembly hall, in which quite famous personages appeared; a place, however, which stills bears evidence of a former greatness by its numerous hotels (in one of which Handel, while waiting for a boat, is said to have composed portions of the *Messiah*) – and now a scene of decayed grandeur and fallen fortunes.

A welcome feature amid the drowsy scenes are those placid pools of refreshment, the Meres, chief among which is Rostherne, ranking, says one writer, " with the English lakes in solemn and picturesque beauty." There is a record of it in 1427, when it was " a free fishery, with one batello " (small boat) ; and Leland in his *Itinerary*, 1535, tells us that he " cam by a park where Mr. Leycestre dwellith," found " veri good corne ground," and noted " a poole of a ij or iij mile in length, veri plentiful of fische." Rostherne Mere is a scene of some mystery, for its upper and lower waters are quite different, salt and fresh ; and the fish that inhabit one part perish in the other. By subterranean communications it is said to reach to the

Irish Channel. The place has its pathos also, for an effigy in the Church reminds us of the fate of the noble Beatrix Egerton who died on the eve of her wedding. A weird story is connected with Bagmere, near Somerford, that whenever a Brereton is about to die there rise to the surface the trunks of sunken trees. Redesmere has no legend ; it is just a beautiful stretch of water glimpsed from the solitudes between Nether Alderley and Congleton.

And what is to be said of the Cheshire rivers ? Perhaps Drayton said most in his invocation to the county :

O, thou thrice happy shire, confinéd so to be
'Twixt two so famous floods as Mersey is and Dee,
Thy Dee upon the West from Wales doth thee divide,
The Mersey on the North from the Lancastrian side.

Strictly correct, if not sublimely poetical ; but the writer of the *Polyolbion* wisely refrained from going further and plunging into controversy. For long and furious have been the wordy battles fought over the origin of the Mersey, and the confluence

Wythenshawe Hall

of the Etherow and Goyt. One diligent investigator has traced "Ederhow" as early as 1226, "thus proving," he triumphantly exclaims, "the priority of the name for that part of the river over the name Mersey by fully three and a half centuries, the name Mersey first being applied to that part of the river as late as 1577." The Guit, or Goyt, is mentioned between 1208 and 1229; it joins the Etherow, and they flow into the Tame at Stockport where the Mersey is formed. The district has borne the name of Teviot Dale since Prince Charlie's army, on the march southwards, encamped for the night on Lancashire Hill which overlooks the Dale; and the name Mersey, they said, reminded them of their own fertile plain, The Merse.

Cheshire's real river is the "wizard Dee" of Milton's verse, seen at its best as it rolls slow and wide under the Chester bridges and moves on through picturesque vales. But it has its dull and dangerous reach as it creeps along the shore of treacherous sand where the estuary widens out. Charles Kingsley relates at length

in *Alton Locke* how he came to compose the ballad *The Sands of Dee.* The young Chartist hero, passionately in love with Lillian Winnstay, heard her at the piano

" strike into an old air, wild and plaintive, rising and falling like the swell of an Æolian harp upon a distant breeze. ' Ah, now,' she said, ' if I could get words for that ! What an exquisite lament somebody might write to it.' As it happened, my attention was caught by hearing two gentlemen close to me discuss a beautiful sketch, by Copley Fielding, which hung on the wall—a wild waste of tidal sands, with here and there a line of stake-nets fluttering in the wind ; a grey shroud of rain sweeping up from the westward through which low red cliffs glowed dimly in the rays of the setting sun ; a train of horses and cattle splashing slowly through shallow desolate pools and creeks, their wet red and black hides glittering in one long line of level light. . . . One of them had seen the spot represented as the Mouth of the Dee, and heard the tale of a girl who, in bringing her father's cattle home across the sands, had been caught by a sudden flow of the tide, and was found next day a corpse. The tragedy, the art of the picture, the simple, dreary grandeur of the scenery, took possession of me. . . . Lillian's wild air rang still in my ears and combined itself somehow

with that picture of the Cheshire Sands and the story of the drowned girl, till it shaped itself into a song."

Kingsley's description of the desolate scene with its tragic suggestiveness serves as a perfect memorial picture of the Sands of Dee.

Cheshire is a land of small streams trickling to dimpled nooks, plashing gently by shady pleasaunces, rippling by little towns. The Weaver, Etherow, Goyt, Peover, have their own special lure, and along their curving courses are unfolded the beauty of dell and hill. The lively Dane, springing from rocky heights, ruffles its way through the gorges and blithely freshens that favourite picture where Wincle lies in an entrancing vale. Curving by lush meadows, gliding beside shadowy pathways, crooning in the dales, hiding in the deep silky woods, the rivulets add their charm and variety to the Cheshire scenes, where the poet responds to " the lyric touch of solitude," and where peace and balm " entice the dewy-feather'd sleep."

And for those who do not so much care for poetry, there are trout !

TABLEY OLD HALL

X. POETS' PATHWAYS

CANDOUR, which is compelled to place truth before kindness, confesses that while Cheshire furnishes good names in literature it lacks the lustre of a splendid name. Some of the associations are adventitious, and among the most noted in the gallery of authors are not a few "more respected than read." We repose faith in Tillotson, Matthew Henry, and Reginald Heber, those admirable divines; we concede fame to Samuel Rogers and Thomas Parnell without searching their poems for evidence; we admire Sir Thomas Browne without mastering his euphuisms. Their classic rank is indisputable and undisputed, and they were Cheshire-born no matter where they spent the greater part

of their lives. Nicholas Ferrar, scientist and theologian of old-school style, and John Gerarde, the quaint herbalist, of Crowton Hall, excite the interest of the curious. Raphael Holinshed, of the *Chronicles*, and John Speed, the tailor's son of Farndon, a Dee village famed for its bridge of many arches, took all England for their subject, not a county. None of these breathe Cheshire in their works or really represent its spirit. Charles Kingsley was derived from the De Kingsleys who once held the mastership of Delamere Forest, and their love of outdoor life may have been transmitted to the poet of the wild north-easter, but he can no more be called a Cestrian on that account than can Dean Stanley because of his link with a noble Cheshire family. Those who seek to establish claims for Congreve, the dramatist, who, on uncertain evidence, may have been born in the pretty village of thatched cottages, Burton-in-Wirral, and for Mrs. Gaskell on the strength of her *Cranford* depictions, forget that the one was an exile and the other only a migrant. When the whole case is reasonably examined we find

that the true sons of Cheshire were two indefatigable antiquaries, Ormerod and Earwarker, and two – or at most, three – delightful and not undistinguished poets, Lord de Tabley, Thomas Ashe, and Egerton Warburton. But in the whole list, only Lord de Tabley has a secure place.

The lover of pilgrimages soon becomes familiar with the fair smooth landscape and the woody patches round about Knutsford. In the deepening-down of the year, a befitting time to view Cheshire landscape through a poet's eyes, the scene is one of beauty, even if it be tinged with pathos. The long level fields stretch far; the black and sharpened branches of leafless trees lift long sheaths piercing the misty air; or, where the copses lie, make a roofage of feathery tips. The broad winding lanes are seldom trodden, and the unbroken wheel-grooves are hardened by early morning frosts. Here there dwelt the poet who on such a day may have written those haunting lines:

> Grass afield wears silver thatch,
> Palings all are edged with rime,
> Frost-flowers pattern round the latch,
> Cloud nor breeze dissolves the clime.

KNUTSFORD AND THE GASKELL MEMORIAL

Passing through the old town with its faded relics of dead days, but with its unfading memories of worthies who live in *Cranford* romances, we see the dim outlines of the ancestral Hall of the De Tableys, a race who had the blood of the Conqueror in their veins and the alchemy of poetic genius in their souls.

Sir Peter Leycester, of Tabley, born in 1613, was a Royalist soldier who suffered imprisonment for the King, and like others who endured captivity he turned his thoughts to literature. His bent was research, and we owe to him *Particular Remarks concerning Cheshire* (including a transcript of Domesday Book), and *Great Britain and Ireland*, the two volumes forming his *Historical Antiquities*.

The last of the Barons, born at Tabley House in 1835, died on November 22, 1895, and it is, perhaps, only since that time that an adequate sense of his place in literature has prevailed. He was often to be seen in the lanes and woods, a man not easily accessible, a man not feeling much in common with his age. For lack of encouragement he ceased his singing entirely

for no less a period than twenty years, and it was so fated that the year which saw the re-issue of his poems was the year of his death.

From Knutsford, along almost deserted roads, past scattered cottages and an occasional farm, skirting woods deep in ruin and hoarding their winter silence, we reach at last the quaint village of Lower Peover where stands a stone cross, and thereon read words which his pen had inscribed many years before :

Peace ! there is nothing more for men to speak :
A larger wisdom than our lips decrees.
Of that dumb mouth no longer reason seek,
No censure reaches that eternal peace,
And that immortal ease.

It is seldom that an epitaph so clearly reveals the mind of the man for whom it serves. The whole poem from which the verse is taken – *Misrepresentation*, a protest against " earth's invidious comment " on great lives misunderstood – is indicative of a prevalent mood of its author.

Lord de Tabley's literary career was a strange admixture of success and failure.

He never lacked the high approval of the critics, but he did not succeed in gaining the ear of the public. Though he has been ranked little below Swinburne, he lived and died, in the popular sense, unknown. Admired for his luxuriance of description, his depth of emotion, and his mastery of language, he had no eager following, no band of worshippers. Praised, not famed. This Cheshire poet, whose monument is hidden away in the tiny village, is one of the nation's possessions, and the bramble planted on his grave serves as nature's homage to a devout worshipper. Lord de Tabley was a naturalist as well as a poet, and his county owes him something for *The Flora of Cheshire,* which was not issued, however, until four years after his death.

If his twenty years' silence was almost a tragedy, as one of his biographers has said, it was a punishment on the age that chilled him. His subjects were eclectic ; he preferred classical themes, and his statuesque Grecian style needs a special and scholarly public to appraise it. Yet there are short poems ringing with music and aglow with colour which should have found

their way into the heart of the multitude. Take his vivid picture from *An Ocean Grave.*

Black piers with crust of dripping green,
One foreland, like a hand,
O'er intervals of grass between
Grey lonely dunes of sand.

A church of silent weathered looks,
A breezy reddish tower,
A yard whose mounded resting-nooks
Are tinged with sorrel-flower.

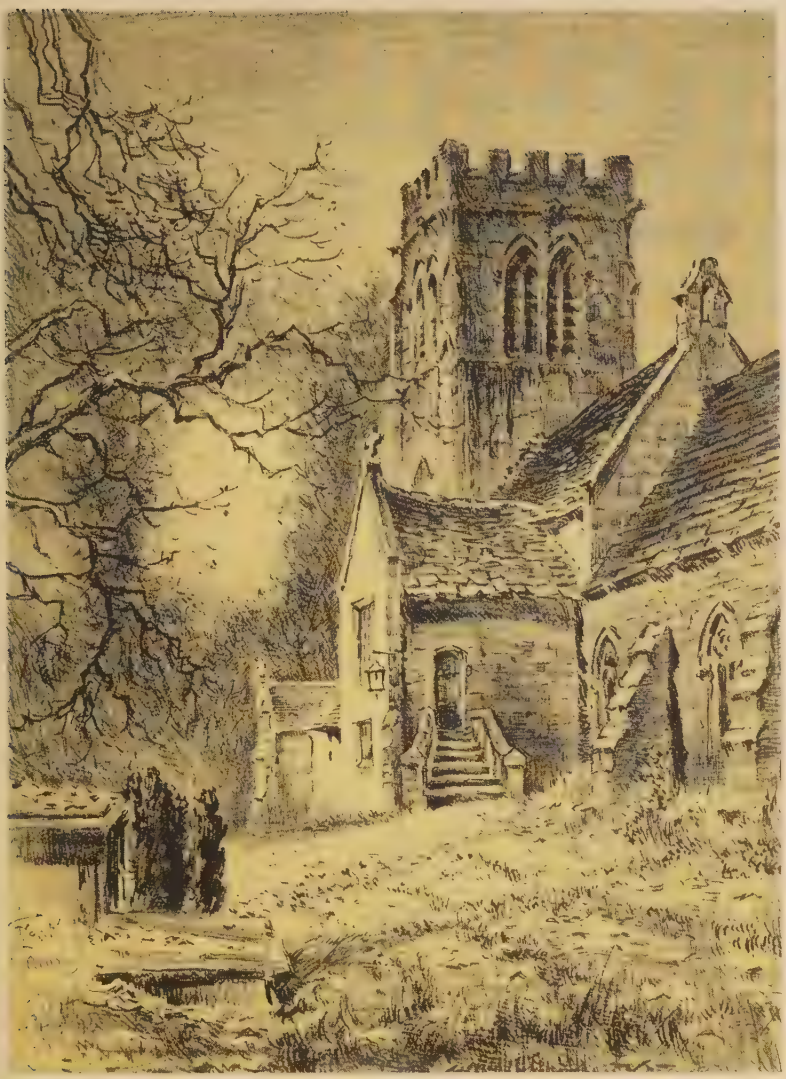
In peace the swallow's eggs are laid
Along the belfry walls;
The tempest does not reach her shade,
The rain her silent halls.

He had felicity of expression, as when he spoke of a winter-scene:

The clods are ironbound,
And the boughs are crystall'd hoar,
And the red leaf nail'd aground.

When the rusty blackbird strips
Bunch by bunch the coral thorn,
And the pale day-crescent dips
New to heaven a slender horn.

We could almost fancy it was a Cheshire



NETHER ALDERLEY: ST. MARY'S CHURCH

village that the poet described in haunting lines such as these :

The whip cracks on the plough-team's flank,
The thresher's flail beats duller.
The round of day has warmed a bank
Of cloud to primrose colour.

The dairy girls cry home the kine,
The kine in answer lowing ;
And rough-haired louts with sleepy shouts
Keep crows whence seed is growing.

The creaking wain, brushed through the lane,
Hangs straws on hedges narrow ;
And smoothly cleaves the soughing plough,
And harsher grinds the harrow.

Comes from the roadside inn caught up,
A brawl of crowded laughter,
Thro' falling brooks and cawing rooks,
And a fiddle scrambling after.

Tennyson not inappropriately likened this " shy woodland creature " to Faunus, a name which well befitted one of his elfin nature and elusiveness. " It used to be said," wrote Sir Mountstuart Grant-Duff, " that De Tabley had two friends – the one he had not seen for five years, and the other

for six." So much did he love secrecy that his volumes were issued under disguises. Sometimes he was " George Preston," sometimes " William Lancaster," sometimes merely " M. A." His four novels were anonymous. He was verging on fifty when he put his actual name to a book.

But fate was always against him. After his long silence the book of poems in which he decided once more to appeal to the public lay, in printed sheets, in an icebound ship in the Thames. It came belated to the public, and during the same frosty winter the author died. There is something piteous in the irremediable fact that such was the close of a life which saw the world in so much beauty, and lavished on it the praise of golden words. His style – more particularly in the longer poems – has been described as one of " brocaded magnificence," the thoughts " wrapped up in cloth of gold " – a tissue of gorgeous nouns and imperial adjectives. The fault was that the splendour was lifeless. Men were statues; passions were classic, not human; events were of the study, not the street. Lord de Tabley wrote from the brain rather than

the heart, and all the sweet and delicate language with its encrustation of gems could not infuse warmth and motion to the bloodless figures of his conception.

Perhaps, to one of his introspection, there was personal feeling in that bitter ode in which he said :

Strong are alone the dead.
They need not bow the head,
Or reach one hand in ineffectual prayer.
Safe in their iron sleep,
What wrong shall make them weep,
What sting of human anguish reach them there?
They are gone safe beyond the strong one's reign,
Who shall decree against them any pain?

Will they entreat in tears
The evil-laden years
To sprinkle trouble gently on their head?
Safe in their house of grass,
Eternity may pass,
And be to these an instant in its tread,
Calm as an autumn night, brief as the song
Of the wood dove. The dead alone are strong.

Almost a brother in his elusiveness, in his delicate craftsmanship, in his vicissitudes and his failure, was Thomas Ashe,

the Stockport lad who lived a lonely life, found his one solace in dreams, and died almost unknown in the early fifties. He was the gentle lover of child-life, and in his poems we meet a retinue of fairy maidens who bring him fairy fancies. Was he, we wonder, recalling some youthful memory in his native county when he wrote of gentle Ettie :

> Many a time, through wood and wild,
> I went nutting with the child.
> Timid-heart, my hand she took,
> At the bridge across the brook.
> Up through woods and tangled grass
> We clamber'd where no pathway was,

for the scene would apply almost anywhere in the county and could certainly be located in the Cheshire vales. He delighted in these possible haunts for fairy-like meetings, surprises, intimacies, and farewells :

> Sometimes a hidden nook I find,
> In thicket under elm or oak ;
> Where nothing, save the woodman's stroke
> Far off, brinks sound of humankind.

But apart from his visions, Thomas Ashe knew of nothing but disappointment, and his lyrics have the plaintive strain which murmurs his sadness. He had been "heart-set to earn a nobler prize than earthly guerdons," but in bitter hours of disillusion "I bow," he said,

> My head, with anguish and despair,
> And fruit, whose blossom grew so fair,
> Is dust between my lips somehow.

So when the end was near he wrote an elegy which sobs out his story of failure :

No rest save singing, but a song for friend
Have I, and sing forgotten, to the end.
O World, for me ne'er care to weave a crown,
Who hold your smile as lightly as your frown !
Yet I grow sad to think upon my songs,
For which no man, nor even a maiden, longs.
O my poor flowers, dead in the lap of spring !
I think it is too sad a harvesting
For such brave hopes, for such kind husbandry !
Yet I must still go singing till I die.

It is a relief to turn to the third, though

the least, of these Cheshire poets, and find in him a man of cheerful heart. If in a perambulation we turn from the old town of Lymm and betake ourselves along the thickly bordered lanes, we find our route literally by chapter and verse, and come presently into Rhymeland, the other name for which is Arley. Here are wide bespangled fields and a stretch of water freighted with lilies and with a ferny harbourage. The dappled woods, the sunlit lanes, the shady avenues, the rampart-like yews leading to the Gatehouse, and then the Hall itself – a tasteful copy of the Crewe mansion – with its Elizabethan ornamentation, its oriel windows overlooking luxurious gardens, make a setting for romance. Far back in the fourteenth century the lords of the manor, the Warburtons, established their residence in this haunt of pastoral peace, and one of them was a hunting squire and poet, a lover of homeland, a gentle moralist.

The happy thought occurred to Rowland Egerton-Warburton to freshen up arid rustic life by a little poetic irrigation, and he set his rhymes a-ripple. Like the

Arley Hall

Cotter in Burns's *Saturday Night* he mingled a' wi' admonition due, and the thirsty traveller taking a refreshing draught at Arley Spring had the advantage of washing down a sermonette of poured-out blessings at the same time. The would-be reveller at neighbouring Great Budworth would find a moral tagged on to the sign of the George and Dragon :

> So mayst thou with might no less
> Slay the dragon, drunkenness ;

while a wayside cottage supplied the wholesome message :

> Take thy calling thankfully,
> Love thy neighbour neighbourly,
> Shun the path to beggary.

The Squire was a man of fine ideas, true as an Arthurian knight to the laws of chivalry, honour, and duty ; and he was not content to dream alone, but in practical fashion set about promoting the happiness of those around him. His tenantry were his care. Their physical and their moral welfare became his consideration. And, whilst he carried out his schemes, in

whimsical fashion, he impressed the mind by means of versified precepts and mottoes. Small things as well as great were turned into jingles. A fingerpost conveyed the information :

> No cartway save on sufferance here,
> For horse and foot the road is clear
> To Lymm, High Legh, Hoo Green, and Mere,

lines which may have served a useful purpose in mnemonics, as did the further tripping triplet :

> This road forbidden is to all,
> Unless they wend their way to call
> At Mill or Green or Arley Hall.

Over the entrance to his Hall ran a hearty invitation :

> This gate is free to all good men and true,
> Right welcome, thou, if worthy to pass through.

Not that these *tours de force* convey a proper idea of the merit of Rowland Egerton-Warburton as a poet. His *Hunting Songs* have an infectious lilt ; his dialect work ranks high in that class of

literature; and his sonnets show him at his most exalted stage. The rhyming squire could scarcely have lived by his pen, and though his wayside stanzas are read with a smile, it is his goodness as a man that salts his memory. He was the old English gentleman true to tradition, and he carried out the doctrine he preached in his lines:

If proud thou be of ancestors, for worth and wisdom famed,
So live that they if now alive would not by thee be shamed.

He himself lives, not by his verse, but by his worth in deeds of reform. Mackworth Praed would have found in him a model type; Oliver Goldsmith would have drawn from him a moral lesson. While the Squire's signposts pointed to the desired goal, it can truly be added that he also led the way.

HILBRE FROM HOYLAKE LINKS

XI. SKEINS FOR STORY-SPINNERS

IF there is one historical episode which Macaulay could have declared with confidence every schoolboy knows, it is surely that of King Canute and the waves which declined to retreat at his bidding. The scene of that memorable event which drew forth so impressive a moral is variously placed, but Wallasey lays claim to the honour, and can at least advance one valuable item of confirmatory evidence, for thereabouts the waves still demonstrate that they obey no commands of mere man. Let us therefore accept this as Cheshire's earliest known fable.

Another king provides the county with a legend that will not die. Harold, last of the Saxons, is by unimaginative chroniclers reputed to have been slain at

Senlac. Chester roundly disputes it. He was sore wounded (that is admitted), but was taken from the field of battle by two ploughmen ; he was tenderly nursed by a Saracen lady ; by some mysterious means he traversed the country, and finally found refuge in St. John's Hermitage. There he dwelt long, became a venerable anchorite, made an edifying end, and confessed his identity. It is a story for Sir Walter Scott. If anyone doubts it, the Hermitage is there to prove it. Fortunately, William the Conqueror never seems to have heard of it.

A third monarch supplies his quota of romance to the county, ill-fated Richard II. His badge of the White Hart decorates more than one sign swinging outside the old Cheshire inns, and serves as a reminder of the loyalty of the people and of the fact that once the White Hart was in the Royal Arms of England. It is not unfitting that an inn-sign should be the last relic of a cardboard king.

We come to sterner stuff amid the hills and woods of Marple, or Merpul as it was first called when it figured in the Domesday

survey as a waste in the Earl of Chester's forest. The Vernons and Stanleys had it in succession, but in 1606 it was conveyed by deed to the Bradshaws, to which family belonged John, the President of the Court which sentenced King Charles. A veritable type of sturdy Briton, right or wrong, was this John Bradshaw, a fearless Judge in the most critical trial in English annals, and an undaunted republican when he resisted Cromwell for his arbitrary action in dissolving the Council of State. Buried, as a man who had done the State great service, in Westminster Abbey, he was subjected to the indignity of exhumation and a Tyburn hanging when the Royalists could wreak revenge at the Restoration. And there is a legend that the ivy-mantled old Hall is haunted, and that at midnight a headless spectre can be seen, the apparition of "the Martyr." Marple Hall is in decay. It is a place of unhappy memories, with its priest's hole in which immured skeletons have been found and its gloomy room which the spirit of Lady Brabyn has re-visited for a century or so in pursuance of a vow to terrify her brother

Marple Hall

and his heirs for expelling her from her home.

We pass from royalties and nobles to second-class heroes, or, it may be, villains. What a romance could be woven from the career of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, alternately criminal and crusader, who suffered severely for an offence in his early years and earnestly devoted the rest of his life to reform. He presents a problem the more difficult to solve because opinion is divided as to the actual value of his serious work, admittedly enthusiastic and well intentioned, but not always well directed. Wakefield, pampered in his youth, grew up arrogantly self-confident and over-ambitious. Few men of talent made a worse start and yet were able to redeem themselves. Determined upon a political career and official influence, he did not hesitate, as a means to that end, to abduct a schoolgirl heiress under circumstances so discreditable that even in his own profligate and loose-thinking age he was execrated. The hand of the law fell heavily upon him, and he expiated his offence in Newgate.

That fate, which might have crushed another man, provided Wakefield with a mission for the rest of his life. His intercourse with convicts led him to conceive of new schemes of colonisation for the improvement and wiser administration of distant settlements and for the re-moulding of laws. All of which was laudable, but marred by Wakefield's fanaticism and by his refusal to modify his opinions once formed, or to give heed to the opinions of others who took broader views of facts. He was jealous and undiscriminating; he achieved some measure of good, and might have achieved much more but for his fatal obstinacy; while the youthful delinquent proved himself a man of talent and of ideals, he remains an enigma. Despite the flagitious lapse for which he suffered, we can scarcely to-day take a severe view of the man who gave up all his best years to public service.

Compare – or, rather, contrast – the lamentable "romance" with that of the trashy adventurer of Mottram whose victim, the Beauty of Buttermere, drew from Wordsworth some lachrymose lines. John

Hatfield, humbly born, was determined to ape the gentleman. He found an easy means to wealth by marrying, for a reward, the daughter of a nobleman who had his reasons for wishing to be relieved of her; he dissipated the money, deserted the wife, and looked for more conquests. A presentable appearance, an ingratiating manner, and a glib tongue enabled him to make love and incur debts; he passed as a member of a noble family; he bestowed on himself a title, and he had experiences in and out of prison, intermingled with squeamish episodes among deluded women, just like a Smollett swaggerer. It was in the character of "Colonel Hope" that the impostor reached an audacious height and suffered a disastrous fall. In reckless mood he made love to two women, and married bigamously the Buttermere Beauty, meanwhile forging drafts which a relative of the deserted one was led to cash. The end of the handsome and dashing gallant came on a special gallows that had been erected for him, and, genteel to the last, he drove thither in a carriage, and then scolded the dilatory hangman

like a perfect aristocrat tired of being kept waiting. Wordsworth, who had the privilege of beholding the Beauty of Buttermere at the village inn, and admired her modesty, told

> How, unfaithful to a virtuous wife
> Deserted and deceived, the Spoiler came
> And wooed the artless daughter of the hills,
> And wedded her, in cruel mockery
> Of love and marriage bonds,

and he paid tribute to

> Her just opinions, delicate reserve,
> Her patience and humility of mind,
> Unspoiled by commendation and the excess
> Of public notice,

and it is to be hoped that this served as balm to the "meek spirit suffering inwardly."

The squalid rogue and pest is a sorry enough spectacle on close examination, but there is just a slight touch of sublimity about Higgins, the gentleman highwayman of the Knutsford house on the Heath. He was genuine eighteenth century, and had a strain of humour. In daylight he

was a good citizen, a worthy husband, an honest householder, and a hospitable friend; the county approved him accordingly. In the darkness he was a bandit, a devil-may-care horseman who galloped so fast that he could be home again sleeping peacefully long before the news of his distant depredations reached the authorities.

What a jester he was, this genteel person, radiating pleasure from his well-ordered home, and only tearing himself from the bosom of his family in order to "collect his rents." We see him vanish, the gallant rider, and in early morning he returns, his horse padding softly along the road with woollen socks upon its hoofs – for Gentleman Higgins would not for worlds disturb the repose of his household. And next there are stories of housebreakings and robberies, and virtuous Mr. Higgins is surprised that such things can be, and he tells his wife what a wicked world it is. But one day he happens to blab of a robbery no one had yet heard of. Such expeditious reporting of events before telegraphs existed calls for examination, and there is some quick thinking. How does

Higgins know? And the end of it all was that Squire Higgins, nocturnal rider and rent-collector, found the meshes of the law too strong and close to escape from. He, too, passed into the hangman's charge, and, in course of time, Mrs. Gaskell and Harrison Ainsworth told his story to such effect that Knutsford visitors now regard the tall brick house overlooking the Heath as one of the sights by no means to be missed. And, doubtless, their thoughts fly onward to Hoo Green where another highwayman's exploit is celebrated, for the great Turpin himself scudded past on Black Bess after managing a little job to his entire satisfaction. The good old days!

But is it possible that romance can lurk in such a place as Bullock Smithy? – a name, by the way, that took the fancy of Thackeray. Near Stockport is a village, euphemistically known as Hazel Grove, on the busy road along which the motorists rush unceasingly. It was not ever thus. In olden days there was at that junction an establishment where the expert and delicate task was performed of shoeing, with thin plate, the lean oxen driven their

long and tiring journey from North Wales to the fattening pastures of the midlands. And the story (which has several variations) runs that a daughter of the noble house of Stanley, whose palfrey had been pulled up at the smithy door, saw and succumbed to the charm of the blacksmith's handsome son, George Daniels; eloped with him, and preferred their future address to be Hazel Grove, the locality being a famous nutting centre. Others attribute the change to the inhabitants themselves who petitioned for restoration of the "ancient name" on account of the decline of trade which they thought was due to the Bullock Smithy taint. But we naturally prefer the first explanation, and believe that Hazel Grove was essential as the new postal address of a patrician's daughter and her proud young bridegroom.

The problem of names and localities provides an additional spice of romance to Cheshire if it can be proved that George Borrow's Mumpers' Dingle, where he made his horse-shoes and taught Isopel Berners how to conjugate verbs in Armenian, was on the Grosvenor estate. The argument

in favour of the case runs logically. Lavengro met Jack Slingsby in his hour of ill-fortune. "Would you have me go to Chester?" asked Lavengro; "if I go to Chester and work there I can't be my own man." Slingsby responded: "If you are of a quarrelsome nature, you must not go to Chester; you would be in the castle in no time." Why this talk of Chester unless it was the nearest town? Then the descriptions – they breathe of Cheshire, the heath, the woods, the zig-zag path through thickets of hazel, elder, and sweet briar, and the small rill running directly across the path. In subsequent talks with Williams, the Welshman, the tale is told of the Mayor of Chester who was hanged by a chieftain; and when they "proceed in the direction of Wales" it is obviously through Cheshire they walk, and reach the little brook "close upon the border." The "small strip of grass beneath some lofty trees on the side of the road," which Mr. Petulengro considered such a nice place for a tussle, is a characteristic Cheshire scene, and the inn which bore the sign of the Silent Woman is easily identified with

the Headless Woman in the locality. As for the Dingle in the midst of a large field, the wooded retreat subsequently to be visited by the postillion and the Man in Black, and graced by Isopel with her streaming hair, it is Cheshire writ large – "a deep hollow, the shelving sides overgrown with trees and bushes, a belt of sallows surrounding it on the top." Here was the strangest of love-dramas enacted; here was the scene of that sad farewell when the wandering lord of gipsy lore and the untutored girl with a gentle heart learnt truth too late. And as if the last doubt should be scattered, Borrow in his famous tirade against gentility, in the Appendix to the *Romany Rye*, tells us that he was better engaged at his forge in the Dingle than in running after "the milk-maids of Cheshire," and that seems conclusive of the county he had in mind. No, Mumpers' Dingle must not be Willenhall in Staffordshire; let us revise the former verdict, and award the claim to Cheshire. And the county is justly famed for its Dingles. Is there not one at Lymm, so delightful a retreat that it pleased the

artist eye of Peter de Wint and gave him a glowing subject for his brush?

Fitly may we end with a real mystery which is calculated to baffle the most expert solvers of detective stories. On the bleak high road where the gaunt Cat and Fiddle stands there is a stone bearing these words – "Here John Turner was cast away in a heavy snowstorm in the night," and the date is given vaguely as "about 1755." But the real problem is on the other side of the stone – "The print of a woman's shoe was found by his side in the snow where he lay dead." Who was the woman, and how came she there? How did she escape when the storm overpowered the man? What was the significance of the single print of her shoe? Here is material for a "thriller."

OLD BIDSTON

XII. PASTIME AND GOOD COMPANY

IN one of his prose romances Longfellow said that when we find ourselves in an old city we stay the busy hand of time and call back the shadowy past. The impression that we are so acting is likely to be produced as we linger in the antique places of Cheshire with their legends, traditions, relics, and observances. For custom dies hard, and precedent is revered. Washington Irving experienced an unforgettable delight when he first saw a Maypole on the banks of the Dee "close by the picturesque old bridge that stretches across the river," and "I had already," he went

on to say, " been carried back into former days by the antiquities of Chester, that venerable place, the examination of which is equal to the turning over of the pages of a black-letter volume or gazing on the pictures of Froissart. The Maypole on the margin of that poetic stream completed the illusion. My fancy coloured it with wreaths of flowers, and peopled the green banks with all the dancing revelry of May Day. The mere sight of this Maypole gave a glow to my feelings, and spread a charm over the country for the rest of the day ; and my imagination turned all into a perfect Arcadia." What might he not have thought if he had been able to witness the revival at Knutsford in these days, when the whole of the Heath is given up on one day to the dance and pageantry and merry-making reminiscent of Elizabethan times ?

Had he wandered into places like Congleton, Sandbach, Malpas, Altrincham, and Gawsworth, fantastic memories would have been summoned up of former days and deeds. He might have thought of curious bygone privileges also – of how the rector

Brereton: An Old Coaching Inn

of Eccleston had the right to every twentieth salmon netted in the Dee, how the monks of Birkenhead Priory had the monopoly of ferrying passengers across the estuary to Liverpool and pocketing the fees, and how the lord of the manor of Swettenham supplied forty soldiers annually to fight the Welsh as vicarious payment for his dignity. He might have conjured up the vision of quaint personages, such as Passfield the servant of John Bruen, a charitable Puritan of Foulk Stapleford, whose conceit it was that to retain in memory the many sermons he heard he should wear a girdle of leather, "long and large, which went twice about him," divided into sections representing the books of the Bible and the thongs denoting chapter and verse. Or his thoughts might fly to the little wood at Gawsworth where "Maggotty Johnson," by his own desire, lies in a brick grave surmounted by a flat stone bearing an egregious epitaph which is the wonder and derision of all who read it.

But who remembers this Samuel Johnson of Cheshire now, the "Lord Flame" of

his time, a Jack-of-all-trades? To the profession of a dancing master he united that of a wit, poet, musician, dramatist, and player.

'Twas he with pen sublime, who drew Lord Flame,
Acted the part, and gained himself the name.

Hurlothrumbo was his masterpiece, and it had a run of thirty successive nights at the Haymarket, London, in 1729, the Prince of Wales and all the leading nobility attending, and the Duke of Montagu declaring it to be "one of the greatest works human genius ever devised." The Epilogue was written by Byrom, the Manchester poet, and the Prologue by Amos Meredith, of Henbury Hall. When the play was published in 1729, the names of many of the nobility of the time appeared as subscribers. Johnson had a career of vicissitudes, but his patrons were influential, and in his old age he was able to retire to a small house given to him by the Earl of Harrington. When he passed away at the age of eighty-two his egotism was gratified and he was buried in a lonely place apart from other men, while the poets of the time vied with each other in singing

his praise. Perchance it was because a whilom vicar of Daresbury, known there as the Rev. C. L. Dodgson, and to a larger community as "Lewis Carroll," meditating upon such antics, bethought him that cats are apt to grin at times, and that the Cheshire species is specially reputed for the habit, and so introduced an abnormal specimen into his Alice's Wonderland.

To the lover of ancient rite and rule the town of Altrincham, now a medley of the old and new, offers a unique feature in its mayoralty. The first name in the list occurs in the chronicles of 1452 when Edward Massey was appointed, and there have been nominations every year since, so that before long we may expect a succession of five hundred. But that number may have been already exceeded, for the charter was granted by the lord of the manor about the year 1290, and a mayor was probably appointed then. The post appears to have been held some years by persons of lowly degree, and Scott, in *The Heart of Mid-lothian*, quotes a rude Cheshire saying, "I was like the Mayor of Altrincham, who lies in bed whilst his breeches are

mending," and there is an old rhyme also :

The Mayor of Altrincham and the Mayor of Over,
The one is a thatcher and the other a dauber.

On the other hand prominent and wealthy residents served, and in 1758 a son of the Earl of Warrington, then lord of the manor, held the office.

At Over, which has declined in importance, the mayoralty is now nominal, but at one time it possessed powers and privileges superior to those of Altrincham. From time beyond memory " the borough of Over " (as it was called in ancient records) was under the direction of a mayor chosen by the Court Leet. During his year he acted as justice of the peace within the lordship, and he had a sworn sergeant who executed all processes within his jurisdiction. On quitting office the mayor took the title of alderman, though no longer vested with any authority.

Cheshire charters provide a further field for reflection, not only on account of their antiquity but their curiosity. Macclesfield enjoyed peculiar privileges – it was

Macclesfield from Waters Green

exempt from tolls, it had the right of pasturage in the Forest, and the citizens could not be "impleaded" out of their own town. For twelve pence a year they were guaranteed peaceful possession of house and land, and their one hardship in common with other towns was the compulsory use of the King's mill and oven, at a price that was never moderate.

Chester, being a walled town, had its watchmen to pace up and down day and night and give warning of the approach of friend or foe:

> Above the gloomy portal arch,
> Tuning his footsteps to a march,
> The warder kept his guard.

Not only was the duty carried out, but there were imposing ceremonies connected with the office which signified its dignity and importance. On St. John's Eve a display of pomp and pageantry took place, and in the stately procession there appeared, in obedience to orders, four giants, one unicorn, one dromedary, one camel, one luce, one dragon, and six hobby-horses. The Commonwealth, caring nothing for allegory

or romance, saw to it that both giants and beasts were destroyed.

Then there were minstrels who held official place and flourished particularly under Norman rule. Chester was the headquarters of a band of no small fame. They were under the authority of the Dutton family, and at Midsummer Fair their bounden duty was to attend the heir " from his lodging to St. John's Church (he being then accompanied by many gentlemen of the county) ; one of the minstrels walking before him in a surcoat of his arms, depicted on taffeta, the rest of his fellows proceeding two and two, and playing on their several sorts of instruments. And after divine service ended, gave the like attendance on him back to his lodgings, where, the court being kept by the steward, and all the minstrels formally called, certain orders and laws were made for the better government of the Society, with penalties on those that transgress." Such, according to Dugdale, was the law and ordinance.

Chester's great show, however, was the Miracle Plays, twenty-four of which are among the earliest and most celebrated

cycles in England. They were acted between 1268 and 1574, and in a revised form were reproduced on the first three Whitsuntide days in 1600. These Mysteries were played in the true Thespian cart, "a high scaffold with two rowmes, a higher and a lower, upon foure wheeles." In the lower compartment the actors apparelled themselves; in the upper "they played, being all open on the top, that all behoulders might heare and see them." The actors were members of the various Trade Guilds, and they played "first at the Abaye gates, then wheeled to the High Crosse before the Mayor, and so to every streete." As far as possible each Craft had its appropriate part, the "water-leaders and drainers of the Dee," for example, being happily cast in the Noah drama to manage the Deluge.

The performances continued till the time of Elizabeth, and at last succumbed to the zeal of the Reformation. Yet they were popular long after stern authority had marked them for destruction. In opposition to the commands of the Archbishop of York, the Guilds gave performances till Sir Richard Savage, the mayor, was won over,

and the plays were suppressed as " heathenish, popish, and idolatrous." Then the actors with their open-air scaffold, their old costumes, and rough humour, disappeared.

The authorship of the Moralities is ascribed to a Benedictine lay monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey, Randolph Higden, and whoever he was there is no question that he possessed originality, humour, and a true sense of drama. The play on Noah and his wives and sons is particularly human and realistic, and to this day makes diverting reading ; while in the play on Abraham and Isaac the author touches an authentic note of pathos.

In sport Cheshire was, and still is, much to the fore, and in the Middle Ages all classes seem to have given themselves up unrestrainedly to the rough and even degrading recreations of the time. Bull-baiting was so much to the public taste that laws were passed that there should be no beef for food unless the beast had first been baited ; and the gibe that " Congleton rare, sold the Bible to buy a bear " was rooted in a fact of local history. As for cock-fighting, it was not only specially encouraged in towns

like Nantwich and Congleton which had their pits, but such was the sentiment of the age that schoolboys had the privilege of using their games money for the purchase of cocks at which they could shy when the victims were tied in the classrooms. But this was not the only strange proceeding in these centres of education. Masters and scholars periodically engaged in drunken orgies by way of relaxation from the severe duties of learning ; a week before Christmas, at Witton, the Grammar School lads were entitled to bar the masters out ; and whilst they were to eschew bowling, quoiting, carding, and other unlawful games, they might freely ensure proficiency in archery and thus prepare themselves for soldier service. As for the custom of Beating the Bounds at Ascensiontide it probably produced mixed emotions on the part of the youthful Cestrians, the procedure being for the perambulating churchwardens and parishioners to administer a sound thrashing, for remembrance' sake, to boys at disputable boundary spots, and to compensate them for the stripes and sores by a subsequent donation. Whether the

palliative was equal to the penalty, and the penalty worth enduring for the sake of the palliative, remains undecided for lack of first-hand information.

And then we come to racing, and Chester boasts that the oldest horse races in the country took place on the Roodee. The history of the Chester Cup is altogether remarkable, for it probably goes right back to pagan times and to the festivities preceding Lent. Among the "lawdable exercises and playes of Chester yerely there used," is a long list of the homages offered by the various Guilds on Shrove Tuesday. The old homage of the Shoemakers took the form of a football of the value of 3*s.* 4*d.*, or thereabout. All persons married within the past year "did offer unto the Companye of Drapers in homage a ball of salte, of the quantitie of a boule, profitable for few uses or purposes." This ball of salt was afterwards changed into a silver arrow, a meet prize for archers, and contended for by them on the Roodee. The homages were due on Shrove Tuesday "at the crosse upon the roode dee," or Rood-eye – whither went the mayor and corporation, and from one

of the homages rendered on the last day of the carnival arose the great sporting event.

The Saddlers' old homage to the Drapers is thus set forth : " Also whereas the company and occupation of the Saddlers within the cittie of Chester did yearely by custom, time out of the memory of man, on the same day [Shrove Tuesday], hower, and place, before the said Mayor unto the Companye of Drapers in Chester, offer, upon the truncheon of a staffe or speare, a certain homage, called the Sadler's ball, being a ball of silke of the bignes of a bowle, which was profitable for few uses and purposes as it was, the which ball the said Drapers did cast up among the throunge, to get it who could, in which throunge also much hurt was done, the said mayor and aldermen, with consent of the Drapers aforesaid, did alter and change ; that in place thereof the said Company of Sadlers should offer before the mayor unto the Drapers, a bell of silver, the which bell was ordained also to the reward for that horse which with speede running there should run before all others, and then presentlye should be given, the

same day and place." In 1609 the conditions of bearing away the bell totally changed. The pagan associations of Shrove Tuesday were eliminated, the Drapers and Saddlers vanished, and the contest on the Roodee became St. George's race. James I encouraged the sport, and it was during his reign that the prizes became far more substantial, three cups in 1610, and "one faire silver cuppe," valued at eight pounds, in 1623.

In the Harleian manuscripts the programme of the civic march to the Roodee is minutely given. First came men in ivy, with black hair and beards "very owgly to behoulde," with garlands and clubs. The duty of these "salvage men" was to scatter fireworks abroad to "make way for the rest of the showe." Then followed St. George on horseback, with his attendants; then Fame, also on horseback, with a trumpet and an oration ready for delivery. Next came Mercury, "to descend from above in a cloude, his winges and all other matters in pompe and heavenlie musicke with him, and after his oration spoken to ryde on horseback with the musicke before him."

Then followed one called Chester, " with an oration and drums," and others bearing the arms of the King, and of the Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester. Close behind these rode the prize-bearers with a " bell dedicated to the Kinge, being double gilt, with the King's arms upon " ; the " bel dedicated to the Prince with his armes," and the " cup for St. George," carried upon a sceptre " in pompe." The seventeenth century populace had an appetite for speech-making, for Peace, Plenty, Envy, and Love delivered their orations before the mayor and his brethren in their best apparel of scarlet.

They likewise loved and honoured the feast. If we turn to the accounts of churchwardens we find prominent and frequent reference to eating, drinking, costuming, and wine for gentlemen at sports ; while simnels, pancakes, fig-puddings, plum porridge, buns, and all sorts of confections during the Wakes period attested to healthy appetites and to the catering for every taste. Charles Dickens, who visited Chester to give his readings, has not left us so agreeable an impression ; but it must be explained

that he made his visit in winter, when snow had fallen, and the hall in which he was to speak was " like a Methodist Chapel in low spirits with a cold in its head." The hotel, he said, was " very nice but cold," and he was found sitting on the hearthrug with a Turkish fez on his head, and feeling " like something good to eat being kept cool in a larder."

We must not conclude on a note like that. One of his contributors to *All the Year Round* in 1877 gave a vivid description of the old city and enjoyed it under every aspect. And at eventide, he said, " in the sweet early summer, when soft breezes steal the perfume of the hawthorn, there are few more pleasant lounges than the walls of Chester, looking down on the modern city which has overflown its barrier and spread out far and wide ; on the orchards bright with rosy-hearted apple-blossom ; and on the Dee hurrying sea-ward." With our eyes on such a picture we can rest content.

THE END

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Scale of Miles
IRISH SEA
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Hilbre I.
Bidston
BIRKENHEAD
Hoylake
Thurstaston
Bebington
Eastham
Park Gate
R. DEE
R. MERSEY
Warrington
Daresbury
Halton
Great Budworth
R. Weaver
Frodsham
Burton
Shotwick
NORTHWICH
Delamere Forest
Eddisbury
Vale Royal
CHESTER
Over
River Dee
FLINT
Eccleston
Tarporley
R. Gowy
Eaton Hall
River
Beeston Castle
Farndon
NANTWICH
Malpas
Combermere Abbey
N
W
E
S

Black Hill
Longdendale
Mottram
HYDE
R. Etherow
STOCKPORT
Werneth Low
Warburton
Wythenshawe
Cheadle
Marple
Altrincham
River Goyt
Lymm
Bowdon
Handforth
Lyme Park
WILMSLOW
DERBY-
SHIRE
Knutsford
Prestbury
Alderley Edge
Tabley
MACCLESFIELD
Peover
Macclesfield Forest
The Cat & Fiddle Inn
Gawsworth
Rudheath
Holmes Chapel
Bosley
River Dane
Brereton
Sandbach
CONGLETON
Moreton Hall
Sketch Map of CHESHIRE
CREWE
Barthomley
Doddington Castle
H. JACKSON.

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